NOV. 4

10¢

Judson Philips' *Exciting New Gridiron Novel*

ARGOSY

RED STAR MAGAZINE 11-4

WEEKLY

The Exciting Story of a Football Racketeer

Touchdown Broadway!

and

A Unique Novelet of Planet-Adventure by Wm. G. Beyer

Fine Fiction by Philip Ketchum Jonathan Stagge *and others*

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A YEAR AGO HE WAS SET TO BE FIRED

... NOW HE'S RIGHT-HAND-MAN TO THE BOSS!

"YES sir," continued Joe, "his desk used to be right next to mine—now look where he is."

Half proudly and half enviously he and Frank watched Ed as he swung down the company steps, his arm linked in that of J.P., the head of the firm. Ed is getting $7,500 a year now, while Joe at $5,000 is a long way ahead of Frank, a newcomer.

"Boy, he must be plenty smart," said Frank.

"Plenty smart is right," said Joe. "Ed has a lot on the ball, but in spite of that he was slated to go."

"For what?" Frank wanted to know. "A guy like that . . ."

"Well, maybe you wouldn't believe it, but it was his breath . . ."

"Drank a lot, eh?"

"Not Ed. Never a drop, but most of the time he had a case of halitosis* that would knock you down."

"One of those birds, eh? Didn't he read the Listerine Antiseptic ads. Didn't anybody tip him off?"

"Sure, I tipped him off, but not before he almost got the toss. You see, Ed had to see an awful lot of people—close contact stuff. At first they never said anything about it, but later on that breath of his was getting him in bad with his customers. Finally a few of the crustier ones began to write in, complaining, and at last J. P. himself got on to it."

"You'd think J.P. would say something . . . a good man like Ed."

"I understand he did, Frank. Maybe he didn't make it plain enough. Anyhow Ed never took a tumble—and his job hanging in the balance."

"Chump!"

"You said it. But there's hundreds like him; suspecting everybody but themselves."

"Well," demanded Frank, "what happened?"

"I got Ed out one night. After a couple of drinks, to give me courage, I let him have the bad news about that breath of his. Told him he better get going on Listerine and keep it up if he wanted to stay on with the firm."

"You certainly didn't pull your punches."

"I certainly didn't. And boy, was he sore at first. And then grateful. Worked my hand up and down like it was a pump handle. Since then you never saw a guy so careful about the impression he makes on others."

Frank nodded. "The last place I worked, they were plenty fussy about that sort of thing. I think every firm should have a standing order 'Listerine Antiseptic before you call on a customer.' I guess it pays."

"And how! If you think it didn't, just look at Ed; he sure is going places."

***Nobody is immune!** Everybody probably has halitosis (bad breath) at some time or other without realizing it. That's the insidious thing about this offensive condition. Sometimes halitosis is due to systemic conditions, but usually and fortunately it is caused, say some authorities, by fermentation of tiny food particles in the mouth. Listerine quickly halts such food fermentation and then overcomes the odors it causes. Your breath becomes sweeter, purer, less likely to offend. Always use Listerine before business and social engagements. Lambert Pharmacal Co., *St. Louis, Mo.*

BEFORE YOU GO TO WORK, USE LISTERINE FOR HALITOSIS (BAD BREATH)

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ARGOSY
NOV. 4, 1939

Do You want to get ahead?..then...

Read these 8 letters!

Two Raises, One Promotion After But 7 Months

Today, after 7 months of study, I have received one promotion and two raises in salary—sufficient to pay the entire cost of the training in a short while. It can easily be seen that I haven't even begun to reap the benefits I expect to get in the *next* 7 months!

T. G. Jr., Tex.

Clerk to Ass't Mgr. in Only 8 Weeks

In less than 8 weeks from my enrollment for your Higher Accountancy Training I was promoted from clerk to assistant manager of the largest A. & P. super-market in central New York.

T. F. F., N. Y.

Two Promotions in First Year

At the time of my enrollment about a year ago, I was in our Yakima office in charge of collections. 3 months from that time I was moved to a district office as office manager. 6 months later came my transfer to Lewiston as district manager. My LaSalle training has certainly paid big dividends. And I haven't even completed it yet!

D. E. W., Idaho

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H. A. S., S. D.

Clerk Aided by LaSalle Is Now Auditor

Several years ago, I graduated from LaSalle in Accountancy. At the time I enrolled, I was a clerk. At the present time, I hold the position of auditor. I have always found LaSalle training *good* training.

W. A. S., Ky.

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My progress the first 6 months was sufficient to enable me to handle several outside audits which more than paid my complete tuition. Other tangible results have been a raise in salary at my original position, and, later, a change to my present work as assistant budget director for the State of ——.

V. C. G., ——.

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R. M. B., S. D.

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O. L. F., Ill.

They are evidence that success and promotion come fast to trained men!

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Isn't it pretty obvious that maybe so far you aren't going about things in the right way? And isn't it equally obvious that the men of those letters quoted above found a more effective way—through LaSalle accountancy training?

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Name .....

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Position ..... *Age* .....

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD.
3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C., 4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE
111 Rue Reaumur

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30x6.00-20	2.85	1.25
5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
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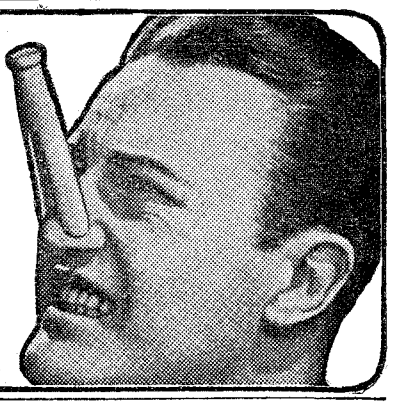

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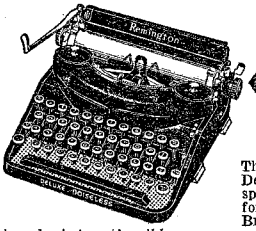

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CHAPTER I

TO THE SCUPPERS, RATS

"FURTHERMORE," I said, as clearly and distinctly as I could, "I have grave doubts about the legitimacy of your ancestors."

This was a mistake. I was going up in that elevator again. I had been going up in it all evening, and it was very complicated because the building was built on a slant. The elevator would swoop up about forty floors. Then I would open the door and step out only there wasn't any place to step to and I would fall all the way down.

I shook my head to clear it, and when I looked down at my clothes I saw they were covered with sawdust. Things took shape—the long mahogany bar, the red-faced bartender in his dirty white coat, and the guy with the pointed teeth that

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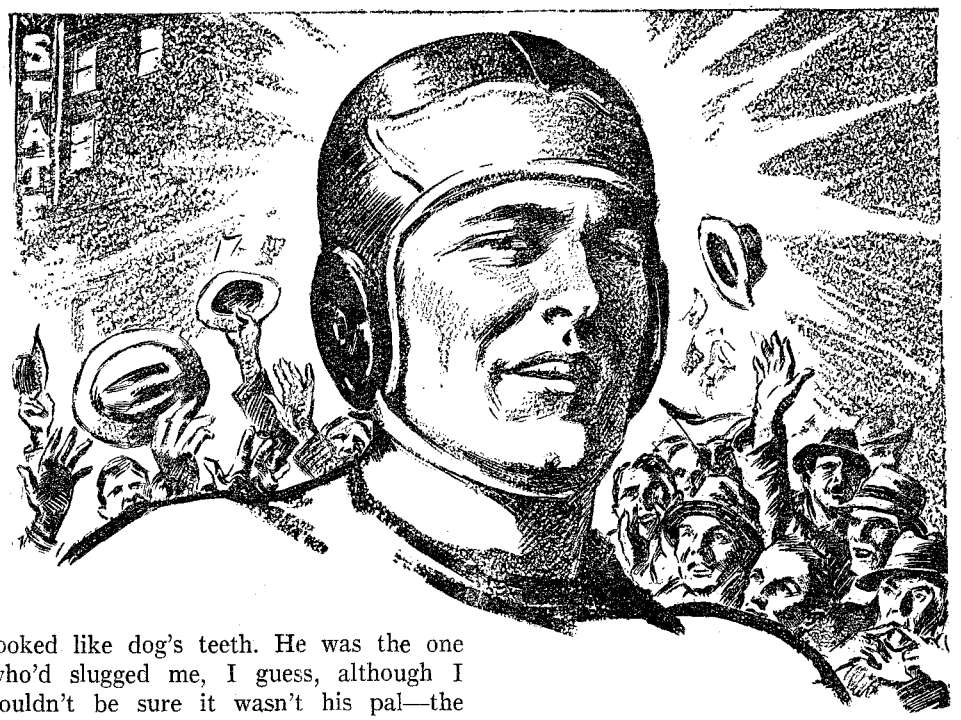

looked like dog's teeth. He was the one who'd slugged me, I guess, although I couldn't be sure it wasn't his pal—the one with the belly and the big diamond headlight stuck in his necktie.

"Might has never made right," I said, with dignity. "The old Southern hospitality of Broadway is over-rated, or else you are both a couple of run-down heels."

I went up in the elevator again and came down with a hell of a jolt this time. I decided to take the next one lying down. I squinted up at these two guys. Dog-tooth was grinning at me.

"Want some more?" he asked.

"He's had enough, Zipper," said the bartender. He sounded a little worried.

"So your name is Zipper," I said. "*Zip Goes The Weasel*—old popular song."

This Zipper pulled me to my feet. He leaned me against the bar and started slapping my face back and forth.

"A wise guy," he said.

I hung on to the bar to keep from falling again. I didn't have strength to do anything else. It was bad. "That is a statement showing your complete ignorance," I said. "If I *was* a wise guy I would stay out of a place where they are infested with rats."

The elevator went up once more . . . and boom! I decided to give up the whole thing. I mean, the odds were too big. Some day, I thought, I'll come back here after I've taken a cure at some nice health farm and I will find these two guys and I will beat the hell out of them. But not now. Definitely not now.

Then I heard a new voice. It was cold and angry.

"Just what do you two think you're doing?" it said.

"Keep out of this, Jerry," said Dog-tooth in a nasty tone. "This is our party."

"I've invited myself," said the new voice. "Can't you find anybody except a poor drunken bum to pick on? What's the idea?"

"He got fresh," said the one with the belly and the diamond pin. His voice was smooth and oily. "He got too darn fresh, Jerry."

"Keep out of this," said Dog-tooth, "or maybe you'll find yourself getting a going over too."

"Oh, boy!" said the new voice.

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I OPENED an eye and looked up at the one called Jerry. I felt good again.

This Jerry was about six feet tall and he had the kind of shoulders you dream about when you're a kid and send to a mail-order house for a set of dumbbells. His hair was dark and on the curly side and he was tanned to a leather brown. I was only able to see his face in profile but I liked the way his jaw stuck out.

"Take to the scuppers, rats," I said. "The ship is sinking!"

It's funny how things stay in your mind afterward. I remember this Jerry starting a short crisp one that exploded straight at Dog-tooth's jaw. Dog-tooth didn't try to defend himself. Instead his right hand made a lightning pass at a spot just under his left armpit. But the pardon came too late. Jerry's wallop landed before Dog-tooth ever got that gun out into the air, and Dog-tooth was sitting down in the sawdust right next to me. Jerry leaned over and took the gun away. I got a look at Jerry's eyes. They were blue, and they were fighting mad.

"You shouldn't have done that, Jerry," said the one with the belly. "I'm sorry you did that. Zipper won't be likely to forget it."

"Maybe you'd like a dose of the same medicine, Saxe," Jerry said. "I've been craving an excuse."

"Don't be a fool, man," said Saxe.

"I suppose Zipper has a license to carry this rod," Jerry said.

"Naturally," said Saxe.

I decided it was all right to stand up again. I hoisted myself to my feet. Zipper was standing up again too, right beside me, brushing the sawdust off his blue serge. I couldn't resist the opportunity.

"And then the fun-loving Tom Rover swung one from the outfield," I said. I gave that punch all I had, and landed on my face on the floor. Jerry leaned over me and started helping me up. I could feel tears running down my cheeks.

"Come on, pal, you'd better get out of here," Jerry said.

"It's not fair," I blubbered. "The guy moved . . . just when I was going to hang one on him." Then he started dragging me out of there.

This Jerry and I stood out under the sidewalk awning. It was raining hard. I hung onto his arm because my legs weren't performing just the way they ought to.

"Someone has neglected the social amenities," I said. "My name is Duke Maguire —ex-sports writer on the *Tribune*, the *Globe*, the *Mail*, the *Telegram*, and the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. It looks like you saved me from a fate worse than death."

"It looks like it," said Jerry. His jaw was still set hard and he hadn't got over being mad. Then he grinned at me. "I will now try a drunk test on you. My name is Jerry Lanning."

Fog weaved around in my brain. Jerry Lanning! "Don't tell me," I said. "Don't even give me a hint. Jerry Lanning!" Those shoulders and that fighting face. "I've got it! All-American fullback . . . Minnesota . . . 1932."

"That's right," he said, and he sounded pleased. "Where do you live, Duke?"

"The world is my home," I said. "The blue sky is my blanket, the stars are my . . . well, maybe you catch on. Direct me to the nearest park bench, Jerry, and remember that somewhere in the world is a Maguire who will die for you, if he has the strength."

Jerry shrugged. "Looks like I'm stuck with you," he said. He signaled a passing cab.

"Sir," I said, "no one has ever been stuck with a Maguire."

"Then we're making history," he said. "Get in." I did, with a good deal of help from him.

The fog got thicker as I sat down inside the cab. The lights of Broadway were a dazzling blur. I don't remember if Jerry and I held any conversation or not. Eventually we got somewhere and he and the driver helped me out of the cab because my legs were now as muscular as rubber hose.

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I remember getting into a room in an apartment and having Jerry help me off with my clothes. Then I was between sheets.

"Tell Winterbottom not to call me in the morning," I muttered. "Cancel my engagement with J. P. Morgan." Then I started to bawl again. "Look, Lanning, I don't know what to say. I—I don't know how to . . ."

"Good night, Duke," Jerry said. The lights went out.

CHAPTER II

THE MAESTRO

WHEN I opened my eyes those little men with hammers were working inside my skull. At first I couldn't figure out where I was. I tried moving and every muscle ached. My jaw felt like one big ulcerated tooth. Then I remembered the Zipper, which led back to Jerry.

From somewhere in the apartment came the smell of coffee and frying bacon. That reminded me that I hadn't eaten for a couple of days. I pushed back the covers and swung my feet over the side of the bed. Boy! The whole place started going round and I had to hang on to my head to keep it from flying off into space. Presently things quieted down a little. I saw the bathroom across the way and made for it, bumping into a couple of chairs.

In the bathroom I found a razor, brush, shaving soap and clean towels. I leaned forward and looked at myself in the mirror. I didn't look for more than a second, though; I couldn't take it.

I started shaving. When I got to the dangerous part my hands were shaking so bad I had to keep putting the razor down and waiting for them to steady. But I only gashed myself three times and Jerry had put a styptic pencil there for me to use. Then I got under the shower and let the hot water run hard.

When I came out from under, I was shaking all over. I guess, unless you've been in the same boat, you don't know what it is. I knew I had to have a drink quick or I was in for the screaming meemies. Then I saw my clothes were gone. But there were pajamas, a bathrobe, and slippers laid out on a chair. I put 'em on and went to find Jerry.

I walked into the living room. A table was set up there with a red tablecloth and three places. Just as I was looking this over a dame walked into the room. She was the kind of a dame if anyone else called her a "dame" you'd put the slug on him. She was medium height, slender, but with just the right curves. She had blond hair that looked at first as if she'd been out in a windstorm and then you realized that was the way she wore it and that it was cute.

"Hello, Duke," she said.

"Hi," I said.

She turned and called out to Jerry who was in the kitchen. "Duke's come to," she said.

Jerry came out of the kitchen carrying a coffee pot and a platter of eggs and bacon. "Hello, fella," he said. "Feeling better? You're just in time." He nodded toward the girl. "Valerie Jones . . . Duke Maguire."

"I had it taped wrong," I said. "I figured you were the Missus."

"He won't make an honest woman of me," Valerie said.

"I get it." I grinned. "You just live here!"

"That'll be enough of that, Duke," said Jerry, and his blue eyes had that cold glitter in 'em I'd noticed before.

"Sorry," I said. "Maybe I'd better go out and come in all over again."

"Don't be foolish," said Valerie. What a girl! "I would live here if he'd let me. But as it is, Duke, I am only permitted to come in and get breakfast because Jerry has difficulty in boiling a small pan of water."

"Speaking of water," I said, "I've got to have a drink."

"Right there on the table," Jerry said.

And he meant water. I started to have the shakes. "Listen," I said, "I've got to

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have a shot of something, Jerry. I'm coming apart. I . . ."

"You had enough last night to last you a lifetime," Jerry said.

Unless you've been that way yourself you won't understand why my legs sort of gave out and I sat down in a chair and began to cry. "For God sake," I said. "For God sake!"

Valerie came over to me and I felt her fingers on my forehead. Then she took a napkin and wiped the clammy sweat off my face. "You can't cut him off all of a sudden, darling," she said, practically. "Get the rye out of the cabinet."

"Now look, Val—" Jerry protested.

"Get the rye, stupid," she said.

She poured me a real he-man's drink, too. About half of a water glass. I looked up at her. I would have laid down and let a truck run over me for her right then and there. "Thanks," I said.

"Now tomato juice . . . coffee . . . eggs," she said.

"If it kills me," I said, grimly.

ALL the cheer that was dished out at that breakfast came from Valerie. Jerry seemed morose and silent, and I was concentrating hard to keep my fork from clattering against the plate when I shoveled up the eggs. Finally the ordeal of food was over and Valerie passed me a pack of cigarettes. No fooling, I began to feel almost human.

"Jerry," I said, "I don't know what I said last night, but whatever it was I didn't thank you enough for what you did. Some day I'll find a way to pay you back. I don't know how, but I'll find a way."

Valerie smiled at me. "You would, too," she said. "But the truth is, Duke, you've already paid him back. In fact you paid in advance."

"I don't get it."

"You gave him an excuse to take a poke at Zipper Collins."

"You know those two babies?" I asked Jerry.

"Know them!" He laughed, a short, explosive laugh. "Those two guys have got the pinchers on me, Duke, and they're going to keep squeezing till I fold up."

I could feel something start to boil inside me. "Give me a couple of days to get pulled together, Jerry," I said, "and then I'll take care of 'em for you. It would be a pleasure."

"Don't be a sucker," he said.

I looked at Valerie. "Is this on the level?" I asked. "Are those two baboons putting the screws on Jerry?"

"Not so it can be proved," Valerie said. "But the answer is yes."

"Give," I said.

Jerry pushed back his chair and stood up. "I've got to get down to the office," he said. "Sam Feldman is due there with some new publicity ideas."

I got up too. "I'll be scramming if you'll tell me where my clothes are," I said.

"Don't be crazy," Jerry said. "Stick around a few days, till you're in shape. There's plenty of room and you're welcome."

"You can keep me company while I darn his socks," Valerie said.

"I couldn't do that," I said. "You've already done more than you should for me, and I—"

"Don't be a dope," Valerie said. She has a way of saying things that doesn't leave any room for argument. "Stick around, Duke, and I'll tell you all about dear little Al Saxe, and dear little Zipper Collins."

"I hope it's unpleasant," I said, "because I feel a slight touch of murder coming over me."

I LOOKED at the frosted glass door of the office. *The Lanning Amusement Corporation, Inc. Jerome Lanning, Pres.* My head was spinning a little as I took in that information. There were things I had to do. Valerie had given me the lowdown on Jerry's situation and I wanted to help him out if I could. Besides that I had what was left of a five-dollar bill in my pocket after buying a couple of packs

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of Camels—said five bucks having come out of Valerie's purse.

She wouldn't take no for an answer, so now I had to figure out a way to get a job. She'd made me promise not to buy liquor with the money. She'd said if I had to have a drink to hot-foot it back to the apartment and she'd dish one out for me.

I opened the door and went into the office. It wasn't much of a setup. There was a tiny waiting room with a girl sitting at a desk. She didn't look very busy. I told her I was Duke Maguire to see Mr. Lanning and I got passed through into the main office right away.

This was a big bare room with windows looking down on Broadway. There was a flattop desk by the windows and a couple of straight chairs. That was all except the pictures on the wall. There was a group picture of the Minnesota outfit of '32, and there were pictures of a half dozen well known football players, and a few of fighters and hockey players and other sporting figures.

Jerry was sitting behind the desk in a swivel chair, and perched on the edge of the desk was a little thin-faced guy in a Broadway Kollege-Kut suit and a snap-brim hat pushed to the back of his head. He gave me a quick glance out of beady little black eyes and then acted like I wasn't there at all. He was holding a couple of sheets of yellow copy paper in his hands, and as he read the cigarette between his thin lips waggled up and down.

"Crisp autumn afternoons," this guy read from the paper, "clear blue skies, all the color produced by the panorama of beautiful girls, cheering crowds, and players struggling for victory on the emerald green turf."

"That's lousy," I said.

Jerry Lanning smiled at me, but there was a tired look at the corners of his eyes. "Hello, Duke," he said. "This is Sam Feldman, my publicity man. Duke Maguire."

"A literary critic, eh?" Feldman said.

"I've only been in New York a couple of days," I said, "but it's amazing how many guys I've met that I don't like."

"That goes double for me," said Feldman.

"Who do you expect to sell with that hooey about emerald green turf?" I asked him. "Why not the greensward? Or the gridiron? If I wanted to take the time I could think up a lot of clichés for you."

Feldman slid off the desk. "Well, what about it, Jerry?" he asked, ignoring me.

Jerry drew a deep breath. "I suppose it's okay, Sam," he said.

Feldman slipped the yellow sheets in his pocket. He gave me a nasty smile. "Which is all that concerns me," he said. Then he added to Jerry. "I'll leave a list of free seats I've promised with Miss Miller."

"Okay," Jerry said. Feldman went out.

"WELL, Duke, I see you found your way down here," Jerry said. But he wasn't paying much attention to me.

"Yeah," I said. "Say, what is all that crisp-autumn-afternoon baloney?"

"Goes in our advertising copy," Jerry said. He crushed out his cigarette and sat staring out the window at the Broadway traffic.

"A four-year-old kid named Leffingwell could do as good as that," I said.

"Feldman is supposed to be one of the best," Jerry said. He looked at me. "I suppose Val gave you the lowdown?" His eyes were very tired.

"Yeah," I said. "You own a professional football team from which the customers are staying away by the thousands. You've sunk all your dough in it, and unless you can show something in the black this season you're washed up. You let a pal put up some dough on the club and said pal sold out his interest to Mr. Alfred Saxe, who carries around one Zipper Collins for protection. Mr. Saxe is waiting for you to fold, and then he takes over."

"That's about it," Jerry admitted.

"Well, why not step out now and let

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Mr. Saxe and little Zipper have the headaches?"

"You wouldn't understand," Jerry said.

"I got as far as my junior year in college," I said, "and the English language is not entirely a mystery to me."

He looked as if he doubted that. Then he said: "Duke, I love the game of football. I loved it when I played it. It gives me a bigger kick than anything else in the world. When I had a chance to buy the franchise in this town I jumped at it.

"I knew we were up against a tough proposition. I knew we had to buck the other league and an established club. I knew that the public still wasn't entirely sold on pro-football, but I figured I could sell them. I figured there must be plenty of other people around who were as crazy about the game as I am.

"Well," and he shrugged, "the sledding is tougher than I knew. I've hung on for two years, running in the red. Now I'm getting to the end of the string. Unless we start showing a profit I'm going to have one hell of a time meeting my payroll before the season ends."

"And does it look like a profit was in the offing?"

"We're playing to worse business than we did the first two years," he told me.

"Does your team win?" I asked.

"We've got a good team; it can stand up to any other outfit in the league," he said. "We might even make the playoffs with luck. But the real trouble is, Duke, I haven't had enough dough to hire the big names. When a kid burns up the country while he's in college the richer clubs get him. I have a flock of good players, but they're all from small and obscure colleges. Nobody here ever heard of them. We need names, and we can't afford to hire 'em."

"So instead of that Mr. Feldman dishes out his line about crisp autumn afternoons," I said.

"Something like that."

I lit a fresh cigarette from the stub of the one I'd been smoking. "If I was you I'd take what dough I had left, marry Valerie, and go somewhere where there's some nice warm sun and lie around in it."

That square, set look came over his face. "I've never quit on a fight yet," he said. "I'm sticking with this one till they count me out."

"Then I guess we have to fight," I said.

"We?"

"I can still throw my weight around," I said, "and after all the one thing I know is sports." I looked out the window and then I looked straight at him.

"You're okay, Duke," he said, smiling, "but there's no use for you going down with the ship."

"I guess I can work the pumps for a while," I said.

I DID some scouting around that day and I only ducked back to the apartment twice for a drink. There're still a lot of boys in the trade who remember me when, and I made the rounds until I ran into Jim Travers of the *Globe*. I got the picture from him.

"Jerry Lanning is one of the grandest guys around," he told me. "All of us would like to see him on top, but the odds are against him. He hasn't the dough for the splurge you have to make in this man's town. The Americans are a good club, but they haven't got customer appeal."

"How could they be made to click?" I asked.

Travers shrugged. "If anybody knew the secret of getting the public to back any kind of enterprise, he'd make a million bucks. Maybe if Lanning had the dough to hire the Davey O'Briens, the Tiptons, the Larry Kelleys, the Cafegos he'd get the big-city public in back of him. Maybe. But they don't expect anything of the Americans and they just aren't interested."

"Looks bad," I said. It did. Travers knew what he was talking about, and he always talked straight.

"We'd all like to do Jerry a good turn if we could," he went on, "but we can't. As a matter of fact only our second-string writers cover the games."

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"Who covers for your sheet?" I asked.

"A kid named Paul Barrett."

"Mention me to him," I said. "Maybe I'll chew the rag with him during the game on Sunday."

I was beginning to get the situation and when I went over the game clippings in Jerry's office I knew one thing that was wrong. The papers weren't giving him any play. They carried accounts of the games but nothing to excite the customers.

I had to admit that they didn't have much to work with. Szymanski of Central Teachers Normal! Kowalik of Henderson Poly! Zuker of Centreville Agricultural College! Boy, what a handful of color! Maybe these Szymanskis, Kowaliks, Gabrowskis and Matuzaks could play football, but who cared?

CHAPTER III

IN SEARCH OF BOX-OFFICE

BY THE time I got back to the apartment for supper that night I had a pretty clear grasp of things and I knew what had to be done. Valerie gave me a drink when I got in.

"You look like a man who has been places," she said to me.

"Lady," I said. "after I've wolfed a portion of that lamb I am going to pull rabbits out of my hat."

She glanced past me into the living room where Jerry was sitting, smoking a cigarette and staring into space. Some account books and papers were lying on the table beside him. He looked sunk.

"You'll have to produce more than rabbits to cheer up the boss," Valerie said.

It was a swell dinner. After I was stuffed right up to the ears Valerie produced a pot of black coffee and we sat around the table talking and smoking. Valerie and I had tried to carry on a light conversation during dinner but it laid an egg as far as Jerry was concerned. Most of the time he acted as though he didn't know we were there at all. I figured the time had come to talk.

"Look, Jerry," I said, "I've been talking to a few of the boys around town today and I've got a few ideas. Care to hear 'em?"

"Why not?" he said, absently.

"First of all," I said, "your club hasn't got any color. The public doesn't give a hoot about your Szymanskis and Gabrowskis. They want names."

"Brilliant!" Jerry said, sourly.

I couldn't blame him for taking it that way, but I had to keep at him until I got somewhere.

"Well, why not get 'em?" I said.

He looked at me patiently, the way a teacher looks at a dumb pupil. "I thought you understood the situation," he said. "Dough! I've got just about enough left to meet my payroll for the rest of the season and have one slightly soiled shirt left to wear."

"I know all that," I said. "Well, suppose you fold up a couple of weeks before the end of the season instead of at the very end? What difference does it make? Maybe if you took a gamble and got a little glamour on your club you wouldn't fold up at all."

He shrugged. "Suppose you're right. All the big college names from last season are sewed up."

"Not all of 'em," I said. "Not the biggest name of all."

He looked at me and I saw a little interest creep into his eyes. "Who are you talking about?"

"Roy Rivers, the Texas Typhoon," I said. "All-American halfback . . . high scorer of the whole country . . . Rhodes scholar . . . the man who can outrun Grange and outpass Sammy Baugh."

"Don't be a dope," Jerry said, the light fading out of his eyes. "If Rivers could have been signed he would have been—and at figures I couldn't dream of meeting."

I leaned forward, keeping my eyes on his. "There'd be no harm in talking to him. Maybe a sporting proposition would appeal to him."

"What do we do?" Jerry asked, dryly,

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"run down to Texas and have a chat with him before tomorrow's game?" He laughed, a very short laugh.

"Let's forget the gags," I said. "In the first place just because Rivers went to a Texas school don't mean he lives in Texas. As a matter of fact he lives in Vermont. We could take a run up there Monday, get him to sign on the dotted line, and be back here Monday night. You and that smart guy who handles your publicity would have a week to build him up. There isn't a football fan in the country who wouldn't turn out to see Roy Rivers tangle with the pros."

"It's a wonderful idea, darling," Valerie said.

"Now listen, Val—"

"What can you lose?" she asked him. "Suppose he refuses? Well, you've had a trip into the country."

"I couldn't meet his terms," Jerry said. But that light was coming back into his eyes.

"Don't be crazy," I said. "Suppose he wants seven or eight G's to finish out the season? You'll take in enough at the first game he plays to pay him off. He'd give you color; he might even make your club a contender for the title."

Jerry's hand shook a little as he lit a cigarette. "God, I'd certainly like to have him playing for me."

"You never will," I said, "unless you proposition him. What do you say? Do we take a flying trip to Vermont on Monday?"

"I'll think about it," said Jerry.

"He'll go," Valerie said.

That was good enough for me.

THE next day Valerie and I went up to the Stadium to see the ball game. Jerry's Americans were playing the Panthers, defending champions of the league and a tough club. You'd have thought the Panthers would draw customers even if the Americans didn't have sex appeal for the public. But going to the Stadium just wasn't a habit, I guess.

If there's anything more depressing than seeing about fifteen hundred people crowded into a place that's built to take care of fifty or sixty thousand I don't know what it is. When someone got up nerve enough to holler you could hear the echo rattling around in the upper deck. It was bad. I didn't say anything to Val, but I couldn't miss the look in her eyes. I was also figuring that probably two or three hundred of the crowd were on Mr. Sam Feldman's free list.

The Americans came trotting out on the field. They were a smart looking outfit. They wore purple jerseys and stockings with gold trimmings, gold oil silk pants, and gold headguards. They went through a snappy signal drill, and warmup. Some kid with a high piping voice had let out a yip when they showed up and everybody in the place could hear him. That was the sum total of enthusiasm for the home-town boys.

When the Panthers appeared in their dark green uniforms there was a smattering of applause. It was pathetic.

Well, I sat back to watch the game. I saw Ducky Porter, the Americans' coach, giving them last-minute instructions before they took the field. I knew Ducky from way back, but I had stayed away from him because I wanted to see the team in action first. Ducky is one of the smartest in the business and I was interested to see what he had done with this pro outfit.

I saw plenty. Maybe you never heard of any of his boys, but they played football right up to the hilt. The Panthers have such luminaries as Big Ed Grady, a whale of a tackle; Eddie Garms; Joe Poole; and Flash Calhoun, who burned up the southwest conference last year. I figured they ought to give Jerry's unknowns a pretty thorough going over.

But they didn't.

Mr. Calhoun, with Big Ed Grady running interference along with their blocking back, tried a few sweeps. They didn't come off. The American's center and Gabrowski, the fullback, were doing a slick job of backing up the line. I looked

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at the program. "William Harris, Center, Pocahontas College". Boy! This William would throw a tackle into a guy, then politely help him to his feet as though he felt he'd been a little rude to get tough. The center of the American's line with this Szymanski at one guard and a six-foot giant named Zuber at the other was a stonewall.

Calhoun had to punt and the A's safety man, a kid named Matuzak from Corcoran Engineering, took it on the dead run, side-stepped the brilliant Mr. Poole, and darn near got away for a score. He was thrown out of bounds on the Panther's thirty-yard stripe. Then the famous Ducky Porter system went into action.

Ducky's attack is so complicated it makes Dick Harlowe's Harvard strategy look like kindergarten stuff. Everybody but the water boy handles the ball in the backfield on a play. Usually three or four guys without the ball get tackled before the real carrier can be brought down. Unless the timing is perfect it can be an awful mess.

Well, the timing was perfect. This Matuzak handles a football in a way that would make the Great Thurston practice his tricks in private out of shame. Snead, Ganzmueller, and Gabrowski, the other backs were just as good. Four plays later the great Panthers were trailing 7-0.

"Hey, they're good," I said to Val.

She nodded. "That's what so tragic, Duke. They're really good—worth seeing. But the public just doesn't come."

IT WENT on being a bang-up ball game. In the second quarter this Szymanski dropped back out of the line and kicked a fifty-four yard field goal from a difficult angle. They had quite a club.

When the second half was about to start I asked Val if she'd mind being alone for a while. I went up to the press box. It was practically deserted. I'd never seen any of these boys before—second and third stringers from all of the local papers. Somebody pointed out Paul Barrett of the *Globe* to me and I went over and introduced myself. He looked half asleep. He livened up a little when I said hello.

"Travers said you might look me up," he said, cordially. "You know, Mr. Maguire, I used to read your stuff before I got into the racket myself."

"Thanks," I said. I sat down beside him.

"You were one of the ones who covered the Dempsey-Firpo fight," he said. "Travers said Dempsey practically fell in your lap when Firpo knocked him out of the ring. Tell me about it."

"Listen, kid," I said. "I'm here to watch football. These Americans are hot."

"Oh, that!" he said.

I gave him a sidelong glance. I'd read his copy on these games and it was dull as warmed-over meat balls. But it was not quite time to talk yet; I needed my cue. I watched a couple of plays and then I acted excited. It must have looked pretty phony, but this kid was green.

"Boy, that Bad Bill Harris is a caution," I said. "Did you see that one?"

Barrett frowned. "See what?"

"He'd've made a great infighter, that Bad Bill," I said. "See him slug and gouge when he gets in those scrimmages . . . and then help the guy up afterward, as polite as Little Lord Fauntleroy?"

Actually Harris was about the cleanest player I ever saw. But I had ideas.

"Is that what they call him—Bad Bill?" Barrett asked.

"Sure," I said. "Just about the roughest, toughest guy that ever held down the pivot post. He dishes it out and then acts so darned innocent. Bad Bill is a caution." Thank God I was working on a second-stringer.

Barrett began to watch with a little more enthusiasm. Pretty soon I let out another shout.

"Hey, when that Ape Man hits 'em they stay hit!"

"Ape Man?" Barrett asked, puzzled.

I gave him a surprised look. "Szymanski," I said. "They call him that on account of his long arms."

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Barrett pushed back his hat and watched closer. The Americans were on the attack now, and Matuzak and Company were pulling their now-you-see-it-now-you-don't stuff.

"I guess Lanning's City Slickers are too much for the Panthers," I said. "Boy, when those Four Jugglers start working the old shell game they make the boys look foolish."

"Say," said Barrett, "mind if I steal that phrase from you, Mr. Maguire? The Four Jugglers! That's good." He was looking as pleased as if he had thought of it himself.

"Help yourself," I said, and I turned away so he wouldn't see I was grinning.

Young Mr. Barrett pulled his portable over toward him and started to pound out some copy. Things were looking up!

CHAPTER IV

GOLDEN HALFBACK

THE train for Vermont left so early the next morning that I had to kind of feel my way into the drawing room Jerry had taken. I had been just enough awake to pick up the morning papers.

When we got under way and I had pried open my eyelids a bit I picked up the *Globe* and turned to the sports page. I wasn't interested in any of the others. Jerry wasn't even noticing the papers. The game the day before had been a back breaker. There hadn't been enough customers to pay the rent on the Stadium, let alone pile up anything toward the payroll.

Well, when I got a load of what young Mr. Barrett had done in the *Globe* I had to laugh.

LANNING'S CITY SLICKERS HOODWINK PANTHERS
Four Jugglers Mystify Champs
Win 24-6

Working the old shell game until the champion Panthers were pop-eyed, the local American club swept the league leaders to defeat in one of the best exhibitions of football seen in these parts in many a day. With a mystifying series of spinners, fake spinners, and triple passes in the backfield they completely bewildered the Panther defense and the outcome of the game was never in doubt. Final score 24-6.

The Four Jugglers, Matuzak, Snead, Ganzmueller and Gabrowski, practiced Ducky Porter's complicated attack with a wizardry that had the unfortunately sparse crowd cheering lustily from start to finish. In all the years we have watched football we have never seen such a slick, cleverly conceived offensive.

An old-time sports writer, visiting the press box, dubbed them "The City Slickers" and it's a name that fits this smart aggressive outfit to a T. Whether Lanning's team has sufficient reserve material to stand up under a grueling season of play we don't know, but if they can keep on the heat as they did today New York can look for at least one representative in football's World Series next December.

But don't get the idea that is a strictly offensive team. They were colossal on defense. With Bad Bill Harris, Ape Man Szymanski, and Gabby Gabrowski backing up a stalwart line such flashing luminaries as Calhoun, Bracket, Phelps and others in the Panther backfield were stopped dead in their tracks. Only a last-minute desperation pass gotten off by Calhoun with half the local outfit swarming over him saved the champions from a shutout.

Mr. Barrett went on in that vein. He got quite steamed up about Jerry's boys. I know if I'd been an ordinary fan that after reading his piece I'd have made up my mind to have a look at the City Slickers.

"This ought to cheer you up," I said to Jerry, passing him the paper. "One of the boys has recovered from sleeping sickness and actually written a story about the club."

Jerry took the paper and began reading it listlessly, with Val looking over his shoulder. His interest picked up.

"Say this isn't bad," he said. "Where did he get these nicknames? That's the kind of stuff we've needed."

"It's worth twenty-five ads about crisp autumn afternoons," I said.

Val gave me a shrewd look. "I guess I don't have to be a mind-reader to know who woke Mr. Barrett up. 'An old-time sports writer.' Nice going, Duke."

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She smiled, and Jerry gave me the kind of look that doesn't need any words to go with it.

"I didn't do anything," I said. "I think it's a swell outfit. Once you get a big name like Rivers on the club and a few of the boys beside Barrett wake up, things are going to happen."

IT TOOK about five hours for us to get to South Shrewsbury, Vermont. By the time we got off the train my tongue was hanging out. The place seemed to be deserted except for a guy in overalls who was rustling a couple of pieces of baggage that had come in on the train. This guy had a cud of tobacco in his face that made him look as if he had a carbuncle. I sauntered up to him, with Jerry and Val just behind me.

"Hi, brother," I said.

This guy looked at me, then went on chewing and pushing his packages around. Well, I know how to deal with this kind. Never hit the nail on the head.

"Kind of warm for this time of year," I said.

He made a gargling sound in his throat that could have meant anything.

"Nice-looking little town," I said.

He spat. There was a post about fifteen feet away and he made a bulls-eye.

"Look," I said, "do you know where Roy Rivers lives?"

He looked at me. "Dunno," he said.

"He does live here, doesn't he?"

"Dunno."

Jerry took a hand. "I guess you know about everyone in town, don't you?"

"Eh-yah," said our man.

"That means 'yes'," I said to Jerry. I was getting sore.

"Can you direct us to someone who might know where Roy Rivers lives?" Jerry said, very polite.

"Dunno," said the man.

I started to burn. "Listen, hickpuss," I said, "everybody in the United States knows Roy Rivers, the Texas Typhoon. He lives in this town. Where?"

"Dunno," and our man hit the post again squarely in the middle. By that time both Jerry and I had to take a couple of long breaths.

"Perhaps they'd know at the post office or the local inn," Val suggested sweetly.

"Mebbe."

"I don't want you to contract tonsilitis from talking too much," I said, "but could you direct us to the post office or inn?"

"Eh-yah," he said.

I swallowed. "Where the blankety-blank hell is the post office?" I shouted.

This guy looks at me and I'll swear his eyes had a twinkle in 'em. Then without saying anything he reached out a bony hand and pointed. The post office was across the street.

"Let's get out of here," I said. "I'm on the ropes."

"Thank you very much," Val said, still sweet as could be.

The man looked thoughtful. " 'Twan't nothin'," he said.

AFTER we'd talked to the postmaster I began to think I was having an attack of some sort. He didn't know where Rivers lived.

"You mean he doesn't live in South Shrewsbury?" Jerry said.

"I ain't sayin' he does and I ain't sayin' he don't," said the postmaster. "I'm just sayin' that if he does I don't know where he does."

"But you've heard of him?" Jerry asked, patiently.

"He ain't sayin' he has and he ain't sayin' he han't," I said sourly. Val got hold of my arm before I said anything more.

"Let's try the inn," she said. It was beginning to get her, too.

The inn wasn't much. There was a kind of restaurant where the railroad people and traveling salesmen did their eating. Maybe there were some rooms upstairs. The guy in the restaurant dished out the same line. He'd heard of Rivers, but if he lived in South Shrewsbury he didn't know where he lived.

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"We couldn't pin you down to a flat statement to the effect that he *doesn't* live here, could we?" I asked.

"Because I don't know where he lives don't mean he don't live here," the man said.

"I give up," I said. I wanted to go off somewhere and tear a phone book into small pieces. Jerry had a better grip on himself, but he'd given up too.

"It looks like we've come on a wild goose chase," he said.

I felt bad about that because I was the one who had persuaded Jerry not to get in touch with Rivers beforehand. I figured it would be smart not to give him time to think up arguments to use against us.

"When is the next train back to New York?" Jerry asked the man.

"You mean today?"

"No," I shouted, "he means next Michaelmas!"

The man looked puzzled.

"Yes, today," Jerry said, softly.

"Oh. Five-thirty this afternoon."

"Can we get something to eat here?" Val asked.

"I guess you can," the man said.

"Don't you know?" I asked, in a cutting voice.

"I guess I do," he said. "I guess you can."

We had corn soup and hamburgers and coffee that surprised me. It was good coffee. I was just starting on my second cup with a cigarette when the restaurant door opened and a young man came in. He was tall, and broad-shouldered with ash-blond hair that was cut short. He wore a pair of corduroy pants and an old leather jacket. He looked at us and I saw that he had light gray eyes that were cold and unfriendly. His jaw was heavy and his mouth was straight and firm.

He went over to the counter and spoke to the restaurant man. Then he came directly over to our table.

"I hear you were asking for me," he said.

"Mebbe," I said.

His gray eyes widened. "Haven't you been asking for me?"

"I ain't sayin' yes and I ain't sayin' no," I said.

"Are you Roy Rivers?" Jerry asked.

"Yes," said the Texas Typhoon.

Jerry drew a deep breath. I figured it was because someone had finally and unequivocably answered a question.

"Sit down," Jerry said. "My name's Lanning."

I GAVE the Texas Typhoon a critical once-over. He certainly had the build of a football player. Broad shoulders, slim hips, solid underpinning. Those cold gray eyes suggested he wasn't the kind to get rattled or wilt under fire. Also, he didn't look like the kind of guy who could be talked into something he didn't want to do. I decided to let Jerry and Val turn on the charm for him and stay out of it myself. My batting average with Vermonters was strictly zero.

"I know who you are, Mr. Lanning," Rivers said. "You own the Americans."

Jerry nodded. He was wearing his best smile. "We've had quite a time trying to locate you, Rivers," he said. "The local people seem pretty vague about you."

One corner of Rivers' mouth twitched but his pale eyes stayed unamused. "Vermonters are a literal people," he said. "You see, my name really isn't Rivers."

I hung on to the table. The merry-go-round was starting up again!

"Oh?" said Jerry, politely.

"I took that name when I went to college."

"I see," said Jerry.

Rivers looked at Jerry hard, as if he expected questions. Jerry didn't ask any. I thought Rivers relaxed a little and I got the notion there was something screwey. Still it wasn't up to me to butt in.

"Perhaps you can guess why we've come to see you," Jerry said.

"Perhaps," said Rivers. There was the old Vermont stuff again.

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"I don't know your reasons for refusing to play pro football," Jerry said. "I know you've had plenty of offers. But I've come up here on the chance that you would reconsider."

Rivers looked down at his strong, capable hands. "I was always willing to play professionally—at my terms," he said.

"Ah," said Jerry.

"Perhaps you know I've earned a Rhodes Scholarship," Rivers said. "One of the conditions I made was that I wouldn't agree to play beyond this season." Jerry met his eyes and nodded. "I see."

"Most of the promoters weren't prepared to invest the kind of money I want in a one-year proposition. They seemed to think that a first-year man doesn't pay dividends."

Jerry drew on his cigarette. "I'll be frank with you, Rivers. I want your name. We've got a good club—a damn good club. But we're not drawing customers. Perhaps I'm tipping my mitt too much when I say I believe you're box office and that you could start the turnstiles clicking. This is all beside my firm belief that you would make a great player for us."

"If I were to play I'd give it all I had," Rivers said.

Jerry smiled. "Since the one-year clause is not a stumbling block, what else stands in the way of your signing with us?"

"Salary," said Rivers, in a short, clipped voice.

"Mention a figure," said Jerry, cheerfully.

"I'd better tell you that it's high," said Rivers. "That there's no use trying to argue about it." I could see there wouldn't be any arguing with that jaw he had.

"Shoot," said Jerry.

He shot.

"To play professional football for one season," said the Texas Typhoon, "I want exactly seventeen thousand, four hundred and thirty-two dollars and sixty-seven cents!"

MY MOUTH fell open about a foot. I saw Jerry's face go stiff. Val's fingers tightened on the edge of the table. That was about twice as much as we'd figured a generous offer would be. I couldn't hold in.

"You wouldn't knock off the sixty-seven cents just to make it easier to keep books?"

"I would not," said Rivers, coldly. "That is my figure, Mr. Lanning. And I would not pull on a pair of shoulder pads until I had exactly seventeen thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars and sixty-seven cents in advance."

"We might throw in the Ford Building at the World's Fair just to make it more alluring," I said. I know I shouldn't have shot my mouth off. But seventeen thousand bucks . . .

Rivers didn't even look at me. He kept his pale eyes fixed on Jerry as if daring him to complain. I had to hand it to Jerry. His voice was as casual as if he had been talking about the price of eggs.

"That amounts to something over two thousand dollars a game, since we have eight games left to play," he said. "Suppose you were hurt. Would you expect to collect in full?"

"In full—in advance," said Rivers. "That's a risk you'd have to run. I can only tell you that in three years of varsity football I never had a minute of time out taken for me."

"But you must have taken an awful beating, particularly around the head," I said.

Rivers ignored me. He and Jerry were like two fighters sizing each other up. Then Jerry spoke.

"You must admit, Rivers, that the amount you ask, aside from being surprisingly large is very odd. Why the four hundred and thirty-two sixty-seven? Why not an even figure?"

"Because that is the amount I have to have," said Rivers.

"I guess there isn't any more to say," Val said, disappointedly. Jerry crushed out his cigarette in the saucer of his

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coffee cup. "Look, Rivers, would you mind giving me about ten minutes to talk this over with Miss Jones and Mr. Maguire?"

"Not at all," said Rivers. He got up promptly and sauntered out of the restaurant.

"The guy is nuts!" I said, when he was out of hearing. I said it with plenty of feeling.

"I don't think so," Jerry said. "He's got a reason for asking for that much dough."

"So what?" I said. He had a reason, sure; he wanted a lot of money quick. But he was still crazy.

Jerry looked at Val. "Maybe I'm wrong, but I think that guy would play his heart out for us if we met his terms. I think he might pull us through."

"But Jerry, you can't pay that kind of salary! Why, that's more than the very best pro players are getting."

Jerry nodded. But there was a tight look about his mouth, and his eyes were bright. "I know. But if he drew the crowds . . ."

"Hey," I said, "you were the one who talked about not being able to afford to hire Rivers. Now that he's asking for the mint, you get interested."

"Maybe I've got a hunch," Jerry said. He was very solemn. But it was too much for me.

"Maybe we ought to have brought along a strait-jacket," I said.

Jerry reached out and covered Val's hand with his. "Maybe I am crazy, but if this kid brought us customers it would be worth twice that in the long run. I'm not saying he's worth it as a player, but in our spot—" He paused, looking at her earnestly.

"I think it's crazy, Jerry," said Val, "but if you want to gamble on it, you know I'm with you."

I wouldn't have had a chance to say anything, even if I had thought it was worth trying to argue.

Jerry got up and went to the door. "Rivers!" he called.

Rivers came back to the table. "Well?" He was expressionless and his eyes were still cold.

"It's a deal," Jerry said, quietly.

Something seemed to happen to Rivers. A little nerve flickered in his face for an instant. Then he turned quickly away. I swear I though I saw tears well up into his eyes.

"When can you come to New York?" Jerry asked.

"Now—today!" Rivers said.

"Good," said Jerry. "Meet us at the station for the five-thirty."

Rivers just stood there, looking first at Jerry, then at Val, then at me. His voice sounded choked up when he spoke.

"You won't regret it, Mr. Lanning. I'll give you everything I've got."

"Maybe that'll make it an even trade," I said, sourly, "because Jerry's giving you everything he's got!"

There was something distinctly goofy about this whole business. Seventeen thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars and sixty-seven cents! Rivers wasn't his real name! And I'll swear he was on the verge of bawling.

I had a feeling I wished I'd never had any ideas about the Texas Typhoon.

CHAPTER V

PARTY FOR PALLBEARERS

JERRY and Val were like two kids with a new toy when we got the Texas Typhoon back to New York. The first thing Jerry does on Tuesday morning is to go to the bank and get a certified check for Rivers in the amount of seventeen thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars and sixty-seven cents—which left the exchequer of the Americans as low as the Jersey flats in a drought.

But now that it was done, neither Jerry nor Val seemed to have any qualms about the outcome. They were dreaming sweet dreams about a crowded stadium and wildly enthusiastic fans.

Personally I had nightmares. I was the one who had thought up this gag. I was

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the one who persuaded Jerry to go in for this deal. Not that I hadn't tried to get him out of it when I heard the Typhoon's terms. But if I'd never taken him to Vermont . . . What the hell, it was too late to do anything about that.

Coming down on the train I tried to pry a little dope out of this star-spangled wonder, but I didn't have much luck.

"Naturally we're going to build you up with a big publicity campaign," I told him. "Why not give me the lowdown on this salary figure of yours? Why the odd amount? There must be a story in it."

"It's just the amount I have to have," Rivers said, looking out the window. "That's all."

"Why?"

His gray eyes gave me a fishy stare. "That is entirely a personal matter," he said. He dropped the words as if they were chunks of his home-state granite.

"You realize that Jerry has put all his chips on you?" I asked him. "If you don't produce for him it's just too bad."

"I'll produce," Rivers said.

"Then give a little," I said. "We've got to build you up—have plenty of colorful dope to dish out."

"Everybody knows my record," he said.

He certainly was a great lad for making a spectacle of himself. But I had to get something out of him. "What's your real name?" I asked him. "Why did you change it? What's the story on that?"

"I had personal reasons for changing it," he said.

"What were they?" It takes more than Vermont cold weather to shut up an old sports-writer.

He looked out the window. "As far as the public knows I'm Roy Rivers. I made my reputation under that name. I don't see any reason for saying anything about that at all."

I was going good! I began to feel a little waspish. "Why were all the folks in South Shrewsbury so funny about you? Why did they all act as if they never heard of you? Aren't you popular in your home town?"

"Those people are the best friends I have in the world," Rivers said.

I gave up.

TUESDAY after lunch we all gathered at Jerry's office. I picked Val up at the apartment and gave her a personal escort. It's funny, but I had the jitters, and it wasn't because I'd been practically on the wagon for three days either.

"This whole thing is screwy," I said to Val. "Why did you let Jerry go overboard for this guy?"

Val smiled. "I know it's crazy—I'm crazy—Jerry's crazy. But I love it, Duke. Maybe all we needed was to go a little crazy to have things work out."

"Oh, things will work out," I said. "They always do—for good or bad." I probably looked as sour as I felt.

"You make me laugh, Duke," she said. "This was your scheme to begin with!"

"Don't think I'm forgetting that," I said. "It keeps me awake nights."

Jerry had invited the press, too. The idea was to put on an act for the photographers and reporters showing Rivers signing his contract with the Americans. Ducky Porter was to be there to greet his new backfield star and make a statement about championship chances.

Val and I were early, and when we walked into Jerry's private office we found him closeted with Sam Feldman, the publicity moke. Feldman acted as if he had a hornet's nest in his pants. He was walking up and down the room, waving his arms and talking loud, that cigarette waggling between his lips.

"You must have been out of your mind," he was saying to Jerry. "This guy can't win a pennant for you. And suppose he does? People have forgotten him. He was last year's hero. All you've done, Jerry, is to throw a lot of dough down the sewer after money that's already gone. It won't work."

"We're working on the theory that it will," Jerry said.

"It's as good as crisp autumn afternoons," I said.

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Feldman gave me a nasty look. "You wouldn't be responsible for this, would you, Maguire?"

"I am definitely not responsible . . . period," I said. "I am whacky. I don't know what day of the week it is. I just know it's a fine crisp autumn afternoon."

Feldman tossed his cigarette in the general direction of the tin waste basket and lit another one. "You've been had, Jerry," he said, "and badly. If this Rivers was so hot why didn't one of the rich clubs sign him up?"

"They didn't want to meet his terms," said Jerry. His head was still in the clouds. It must have been, or he wouldn't have let Feldman keep yapping.

"You're damn right they didn't. You must have had a dizzy spell to fall for 'em yourself, said Feldman. "That damned kid has given you the rooking of a lifetime."

"And supplied us with a box-office name," said Jerry.

"That's what you think," Feldman snapped. He certainly was a great fellow to have around.

"And that's what you've got to think, punk," I said. "Instead of popping off, start using that colossal brain of yours on how to give Rivers a buildup."

"Maybe you think you know my business better than I do," Feldman said, sourly.

"That's one of the few things in the world I haven't any doubts about," I said. I was hoping he might take a poke at me, but he didn't.

Just then Miss Miller stuck her head in the door. "Mr. Porter," she said.

"Tell him to come in," Jerry said.

DUCKY PORTER walked into the office. He had the face on him of a guy who has just come away from a wake. He brightened up a little when he saw me and came over with his hand stuck out. Ducky is built like a brick chimney, and something happened to his hair so he's got a head as bald as a two-minute egg.

"I heard you were in town," he said. "You're a hell of a pal not to give me a ring."

"We've been busy," I said.

"Yeah," he said, and rubbed his chin. I could see there was plenty more he had on his mind to say.

"Well, Ducky, things are looking up," Jerry said. "Maybe we'll be playing to something besides empty seats from now on."

"I hope you're right, Jerry," Ducky said. "Naturally you know more about the business end of it than I do."

"For a guy who's just been handed a copper-riveted thriple-threat sensation you act as though the sun had been too much for you," I said.

Ducky shook his head. "It's just that I worry about breaking up a winning combination," he said. To me he sounded kind of evasive.

"You figure Rivers hasn't got what it takes. Is that it?" Feldman asked, eagerly. I wanted to go over and step on him.

Ducky pursed his lips. "How do I know till I see him work?" he said. "The point is, we'll have to play him whether he's good or not if you plan to make his name the one to draw the customers."

"There," Feldman cried. "I told you the whole thing was a bad mistake. Suppose he can't play at all? Suppose he's a washout? Suppose he—"

"Quiet, punk!" I snapped. "I suspect Master Rivers can at least figure out the rudiments of the game. After all, every expert in the country picked him for All-American halfback last year."

"And that makes box office," Jerry added. These pallbearers were beginning to get under his skin a little.

Ducky nodded. "I certainly hope it works, Jerry. I'd like to see you get some luck."

"It's in the bag," Jerry said. "We're already getting orders for seats, and the signing of Rivers is only a rumor. We're in." He said it with a bite to his voice.

"I hope so," Feldman said, gloomily.

"I will now sound my A," I said, "and

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Mr. Feldman will give us his personal rendition of the *Funeral March*—his own funeral, I hope."

JUST then Rivers came in. I gave him the once-over because the way he acted in front of the press was going to be important. He was wearing a neat gray flannel suit and a light topcoat. His necktie was a trifle on the bright, collegiate side, but I thought it struck the proper note. He had that tight-lipped reserved look on his face, but I figured the reporters would put that down to shyness. Shyness is a wonderful thing in an athlete if you can play it up. The fans like to be told that their heroes wear normal-sized hats.

When he was introduced to Ducky, Rivers just said: "Hello."

"Glad to have you with us, Rivers," Ducky said.

"I should be able to help you some," the Typhoon said. It wasn't exactly cocky, but I saw Ducky frowning. I had just decided to tell a good dirty story to clear the air, when the press arrived in a body.

Gantenbien, the ace photographer of the *Graphic* took charge. He herded Jerry and Rivers behind the desk and posed them signing an imaginary contract. Flashlight bulbs exploded and the boys got their pictures of that. Then Rivers posed with Jerry on one side and Ducky Porter on the other.

After that the writers took over.

"What finally persuaded you to sign a pro contract?" they asked Rivers.

"Mr. Lanning met my terms," the Typhoon said.

"Give us the lowdown on your salary figure."

"That's Mr. Lanning's affair."

"It's plenty," Feldman moaned.

"I hope to earn it," Rivers said.

"Do you think you'll go as well in the pro game as you did in college?"

Rivers shrugged. "Why not?"

I began to feel uneasy. He wasn't being what you'd call expansive. He wasn't offering them a particularly glamorous personality.

"It's a tough game," somebody said.

"I can take it," Rivers said quietly.

They tried to get a statement out of Ducky. Ducky is a cagey old hand when it comes to dealing with reporters. He never says anything that can be pinned on him later.

"Rivers was the outstanding back in the college game last year," he said. "There's no reason why he shouldn't do well in the league. If he does, signing him will have been good business."

"Do you figure he'll make you a contender for the championship?"

Ducky grinned. "I always figured we were contenders," he said. "If you boys ever took time to come out and see us, you'd know that."

That got a laugh. "Will you work Rivers into your regular backfield?"

"We didn't sign him up to sit on the bench," said Ducky. "He'll see plenty of action." Which is one way of not answering a question.

The meeting got informal then. Jerry had supplied a case of liquor and everyone started doing a job except yours truly. I saw Val across the room with a glass in her hand. I went over to her.

"That's that!" I said.

"It went off well, don't you think?" she said. She was looking happy and very beautiful.

"The kid isn't exactly a spellbinder," I said.

She was looking at him, standing in the middle of a group of reporters. "He's cute," she said. "Someday I'm going to find out what he's all about."

"If you can, you're a better man than I am," I said.

A MOMENT later I saw my pals drifting into the office. Mr. Alfred Saxe, in a tweed coat with a big astrakhan collar, and Mr. Zipper Collins at his elbow. I left Val and made for the door.

"Look, friends," I said, "this party is reserved strictly for members of the human race."

Zipper's lips parted in a smile, revealing

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those white, pointed teeth. "Still popping off," he said. "Looking for trouble?"

"Maybe," I said.

"Maybe you'll find it," he said.

"We played the first game on your home grounds," I said. "Why not give me a return engagement here on my home grounds?"

Zipper still smiled. "Wouldn't that be smart."

"Now, now," said Saxe, in his oily voice. "This is a party, boys. We don't want to have trouble at a party." He looked around the room and his eyes rested on Rivers' ash-blond head across the way. He gently rubbed his big stomach. "So that's our new acquisition!"

"That little acquisition may cheat you out of your pound of flesh, Saxe," I said. "He's going to make it possible for Jerry to pay you off. Then you'll have to find another sucker somewhere else."

Saxe handed me a blank stare as if he didn't know what I was talking about, and then started across the room to where Jerry was chatting with some of the newspaper boys. The Zipper tagged after him and I fell in behind the Zipper. I had an itchy feeling in my mitts and I was hoping maybe there'd be a blowoff.

Jerry's face clouded over when he saw Saxe and the Zipper. The boys around him faded away and left the four of us alone. Saxe held out his hand to Jerry but Jerry seemed to overlook it.

"I'm sorry about the other night, Jerry," Saxe purred. "I guess we were all a little high."

Jerry didn't say anything. His blue eyes had that glitter.

Saxe looked around the room. "Nice party," he said.

"It *was*," I said.

Saxe ignored me. Then he shook his head. "I still think it would have been better if you'd consulted me, Jerry, before investing all this money in a new player." I saw the muscles rippling along Jerry's jaw. "And why should I consult you?"

"Well, after all, I have an interest in this club, old man," said Saxe. "A big interest."

Jerry's hand wasn't quite steady as he lit a cigarette. "Let's get this straight, Saxe. You hold my personal note, payable at the end of the season. What I do until that time is strictly none of your business."

"But if I take over a bankrupt business, how do I get my money?" Saxe asked softly.

"You'll get your money," Jerry said.

"I hope so," Saxe said. "I hope so."

"Don't worry, boss," said the Zipper, showing his dog teeth, "I'm making myself personally responsible for collecting that dough."

Jerry walked away, looking pale.

There was a whisky bottle standing on the table right by my hand. I thought what a lovely sound it would make breaking over the Zipper's head, but I resisted temptation. I wish I hadn't.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Many Never Suspect Cause Of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning shows there may be something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

An excess of acids or poisons in your blood, when due to functional kidney disorders, may be the cause of nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV

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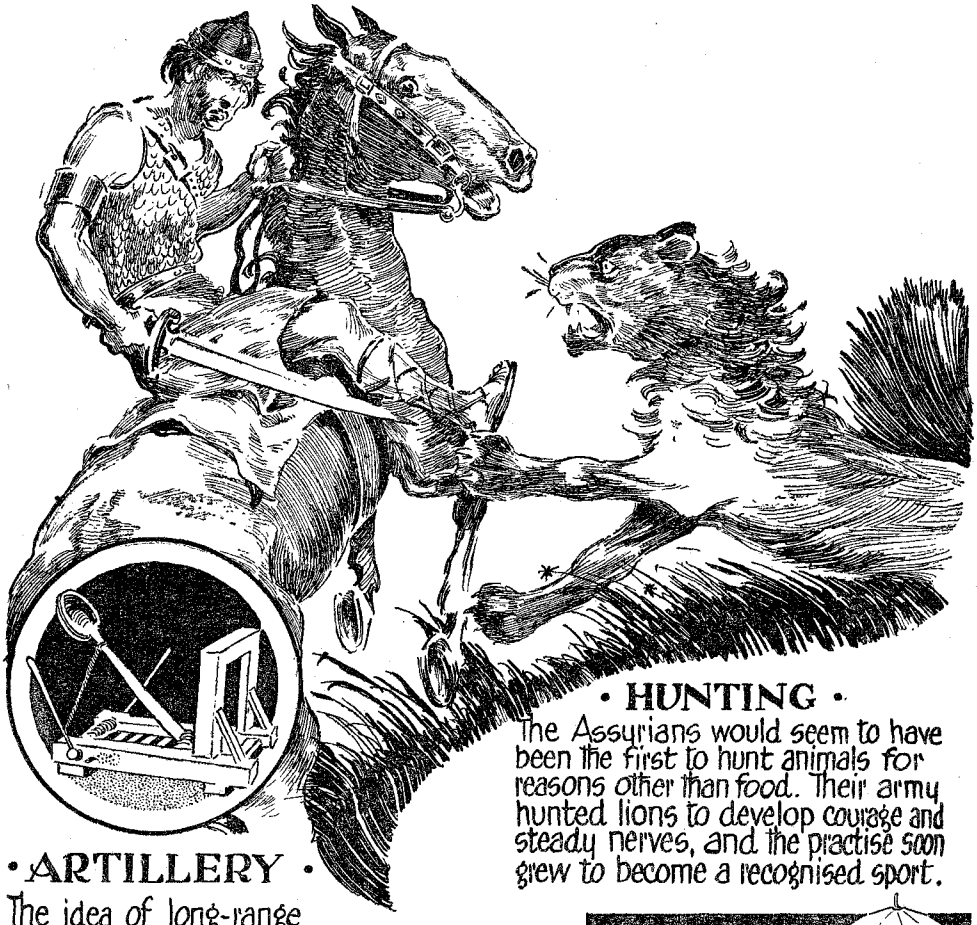
LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : BY W·A·WINDAS



• HUNTING •

The Assyrians would seem to have been the first to hunt animals for reasons other than food. Their army hunted lions to develop courage and steady nerves, and the practise soon grew to become a recognised sport.

• ARTILLERY •

The idea of long-range artillery is not a new one. The ancient Greeks had a catapult that would hurl a 200 pound stone for a distance of 600 yards.

• SADDLES •

Were first introduced during the reign of Constantine I, to enable lancers to keep their seats upon impact. The earlier forms of saddles were merely blankets and a girth.

• UMBRELLAS •

U.S. soldiers never carry umbrellas when in uniform. During the frontier days, an officer of a far-flung post once appeared at muster with an umbrella. Rival units promptly dubbed his regiment the "—th Umbrella". Since then this rain-shield is taboo.

WINDAS 1939

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The Author of "Minions of the Moon" Brings You a Great Fantastic Novelet

Let 'Em Eat Space

By WILLIAM GRAY BEYER

Just a few plush-lined seats left on the space ship, folks—and well worth scrambling for. Today's excursion takes us to Propus, where shadows eat rabbits and you meet the nicest, wackiest people found on any planet

I

MR. MONTGOMERY, first vice-president of Interplanetary Insurance, Incorporated, was gazing in a severe and somewhat disapproving manner over the upper rim of his horn-rimmed spectacles. Across the polished desk fidgeted Mr. Ham Eggles, small and dapper, and Mr. Slim Winters, tall, thin and unkempt.

Ham, with a small portion of his mind, was wondering what would happen if Mr. Montgomery ever should happen to look through those specs. By far the greater part of his gray matter, however, was engaged in pleasant contemplation of the charms of a certain bar-maid of his acquaintance.

Slim, on the other hand, was a man who invariably concentrated on the matter at hand. He was busy worrying why the boss had summoned them.

Mr. Montgomery cleared his throat. "I suppose," he said, "that you gentlemen are familiar with the phenomenon of metabolism."

Ham looked at Slim and Slim looked at Ham. "Why sure," they chorused; then abruptly fell into an embarrassed silence.

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Montgomery dryly. "I knew also, after I had consulted a dictionary. But I'll save you that trouble. Metabolism is the process of building up and breaking down of tissues and cells in living organisms. It constitutes the vital chemical processes of life itself."

His audience revealed by facial expression that it had heard of some such thing back in its school days.

"Now that you thoroughly understand the subject," continued the boss, "you will probably be interested to know that it has slowed up."

"What has?" queried Ham, absently.

"Metabolism, you rum-soaked Casanova!" supplied Slim.

"This fact came to us as a result of diligent investigation on the part of our research department," said Mr. Montgomery, ignoring the by-play.

"We have been deluged with industrial claims that have been pouring in from all over the solar system. This unexpected departure from normal began in the spring of 2074, over a year ago. We have traced the cause of most of the accidents to a lack of alertness and agility on the part of the victims. Workers are no longer able to keep up with their machines.

"All sorts of things have been happening. Men are getting their hands taken off in punch presses; airplanes are making poor landings; bus drivers are getting in accidents, trying to make their schedules. In short, wherever men are engaged in work with machines which are normally geared to keep pace with human ability, they are having trouble."

Mr. Montgomery leveled an accusing finger.

"It has also come to light that men engaged in sound research, in connection with the cinema and radio industries,

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Ham, down again, let out a yelp; but Slim made the jump in time and turned to lend a hand.

have found that women who formerly sang soprano are now baritones, and men who were baritones are now making sounds far below the audible range of normal hearing. And yet the ear has failed to detect any change.

"WITH these facts to work on, we soon discovered that the reason for the condition lies in the fact that metabolism has slowed up. Further investigation has proven that all life in the solar system has been similarly affected. To sum up the situation: life has been slowed down to a crawl. And we must do something about it!"

He emphasized his words with a resounding thump on the desk with a balled fist. Slim and Ham were looking slightly bewildered by this time, for metabolism, a purely biological business, was entirely out of their scope. Slim hesitantly advanced this information.

"I'm coming to that," said the boss. "As I mentioned, we must do something about this deplorable situation. For although the company has weathered the storm of claims, and keeping in mind that mankind is becoming accustomed to the slower rate of metabolism, we have no assurance that the thing may not occur again. We could scarcely hope to retain our solvency if that happened.

"And then, too," he added, as an afterthought of little consequence, "mankind might not survive another such drastic change.

"But to continue: our research workers have further discovered that concurrent with the deluge of accident claims, certain scientists reported a sharp decrease in the amount of cosmic rays which reach the solar system. The inference is obvious—that the rate of metabolism is directly dependent upon intensity of cosmic rays absorbed by the living being.

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"And there," the boss concluded, "is where you gentlemen enter the picture. It is your job to determine the cause of the decreased density of these rays."

Ham remained in a state of bewilderment—at least that portion of his mind which was not lingering on the aforementioned bar-maid. The problem of the cosmic rays seemed as remote from his field as had the matter of the metabolism. For he and Slim were not engaged by the company as scientists or research workers, but rather as detectives, confining their activities to doubtful claims in various parts of the solar system.

But where Ham failed to see the connection, Slim apparently grasped the idea immediately.

"You mean . . . interstellar space?"

"Precisely. Cosmic rays originate far outside the solar system, and you'll have to follow them if you intend to learn anything. Our experts will give you all the necessary information.

"Your ship is equipped with the most modern of gravity drives, capable of many times the speed of light. The latest space-warp principle will be incorporated into the design of the drive. That will take only a few days. You are to use it, of course, only after you are well out of the system."

II

SOMEWHAT less than a week later a silvery torpedo may have been seen flashing past the outermost planet of the solar system.

But if it was seen at all, it couldn't have been observed for any great length of time. For shortly after passing the orbit of the most distant rampart of old Sol, the ship surpassed the speed of light itself, immediately becoming invisible to any observer in the rear of its line of flight.

Ham was staring contentedly ahead into the void, through which they were rushing with such speed that the light of the stars ahead was of a decided bluish tinge, when a frown came to mar his usual serenity of countenance.

"I know it's none of my business," he complained to Slim, "but if it's not too much to ask, just where the heck are we headed for?"

The elongated one lifted his eyes momentarily from a sheaf of astronomical charts and grunted, "Eta Geminorum, Propus!"

"Never heard of it," remarked Ham, returning to his star-gazing.

"A Cepheid variable of the long-period variety," informed Slim. "Has a period of 231.4 days during which it varies in magnitude from 3.2 to 4.2."

Ham continued staring for several minutes before his placidly preoccupied mind digested this. Slim was always babbling miscellaneous bits of information, interesting to him at the moment; and Ham had developed the faculty of completely ignoring him, especially when he had something on his own mind.

But when the intelligence did finally sink in, he snapped to attention.

"That's quite a ways out, isn't it?" he asked. "Is that where the cosmic ray experts said we'd find the trouble?"

Slim slowly uncoiled himself, deserting the charts, and rose to creakily stretch his great length. He was about six feet six, and so thin that Ham always insisted that he had to stand still for at least five minutes to cast a visible shadow.

"That's what they said, little one," affirmed Slim. "I should think you'd take more interest in these minor details. You've been acting as if this little jaunt were in the nature of a pleasure trip."

"It probably is. I don't see what we can do about it, anyway. We didn't even know we had slowed up until old specs-on-the-nose told us. And neither does anybody else. By the time we get back people will be completely adjusted to the slower rate of metabolism. Or the machines will be adjusted, which amounts to the same thing. I can't see where the matter is of any great importance."

"You can't, eh? Suppose the thing happens again? Suppose the rays decrease until metabolism is slowed down to about

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one-third. Humanity would be very likely to suffer a fatal attack of indigestion."

Slim assumed an air of infinite patience, explaining:

"In the normal operation of the human body, a series of complicated chemical processes are constantly in progress. And the whole works would be thrown out of kelter by such a drastic departure from the proper speed of anabolism and katabolism."

"You certainly know a lot of words," Ham commented, not greatly concerned by the dire prospect. "But what has all that to do with this variable star we're heading for?"

Slim chuckled. Ham's question took a lot more words to answer.

"LOOK," he said, "It's believed that the cause of the decreased cosmic ray intensity lies somewhere in the vicinity of that star. Science has long been aware that the rays are sent out by every one of the Cepheid variables. Just why, is not known. But the inference is that whatever force causes these peculiar stars to pulsate, also generates the rays in enormous quantities.

"It has been observed that the short-period Cepheids appear to emit the greater number of rays. Of these, Zeta Geminorum is about the most active. On the other hand, the long-period variables give off very few of the rays. All but one, and that's the one we're going to investigate.

"Propus, unbelievably, has always furnished the solar system with as great an intensity of cosmic rays as all of the other variables put together. And now, practically overnight, Propus diminishes its output to a point comparable with other long-period variables of similar size."

"Unbelievable!" mocked Ham.

"Don't be so darned flippant," exclaimed Slim, somewhat exasperated. "The fate of humanity is at stake if the thing should go any further."

"Not according to what you told me," said Ham. "The solar system is receiving its present diminished supply from the other Cepheids, and is managing to get along just the same. The mysterious decrease from Propus isn't likely to be repeated over such a widely scattered area. My deduction is that the tremendous output from that star was an unstable phenomenon, and something happened to restore it to normal. Logical, what?"

Slim clasped and unclasped his hands several times, meanwhile looking very thoughtful. He then grunted eloquently and sat down to resume study of the star charts.

"While you're looking at those road maps," Ham suggested, "see if you can find if our shrinking violet has any planets, and if so, how big."

Slim grunted again, riffled the charts and picked out the desired one. "The best telescope ever developed couldn't see a planet small enough for us to stand up on, at that distance. The chart shows one planet, about the size of Jupiter, and notes that there are probably four more. Maybe one of them will be our size."

The chart-maker turned out to be a fairly accurate guesser. The travelers were able to spot four satellites of the pulsating luminary, including the one shown on the map. It was altogether possible that there was one or two more, either extremely distant from their sun, or of very low albedo.

But they weren't greatly interested in the possibility, for their attention was immediately attracted to the second world in the system.

Approximately nine thousand miles in diameter, it gave off a bluish-green light, similar to that of the earth, when seen from a proximity of a few million miles. The resemblance decided them. They would land.

If intelligent life was to be found in the system, this seemed the most likely place to find it. Slim was on fire with the thought that he might be able to communicate with the denizens of this planet, and learn from them the reason for their sun's peculiar actions.

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AS THE ship approached, the planet's resemblance to earth became even more marked. There were mighty oceans, vast forests and even greater areas of arid desert. The proportion of water to land was somewhat less, indicating greater age; but it was still a fair substitute for Mother Earth.

"There's one thing missing," Slim noticed.

"Cities," supplied Ham. "I've been looking for them."

"Wait'll we get closer. Maybe they don't live in cities."

"Maybe they don't. And then again, maybe there aren't any 'they'."

But there were. As the ship neared the planet it became evident that some sort of a civilization was flourishing below them. Scattered widely over the surface of this world, were hundreds of large buildings of peculiar construction.

There seemed to be no system to their distribution, for they were situated in the most unusual spots. Invariably dome-shaped, and of a grayish-white color, the structures were just as likely to be seen in the middle of a desert, or perched precariously on the side of a mountain, as in a more conventional position.

"Look at that one!" Slim pointed. "Tilted on its edge, and half buried in the side of that hill!"

"Looks like the inhabitants of this sphere are among the dear departed," Ham guessed. "It's a cinch they didn't build those things in such dizzy places. More likely they've been there for thousands of years, and the topography of the land has altered."

"I guess so," admitted Slim, gloomily. "They weren't built for human use anyway. I haven't seen a window or door in any of them."

"Well, let's land, get into one of them, and take some pictures."

It was several minutes before they decided on one of the structures, situated in a desirable spot. The one selected lay almost in the center of a broad, grassy plain, and they picked it because a clear view was to be had for miles in all directions. If there happened to be any dangerous animal life on the planet, they wouldn't be caught unaware.

The ship landed about a hundred yards from the curious structure.

Slim turned off the gravity controls, and they took a few cautious steps.

"Don't notice any difference," Ham remarked. "Should be heavier."

"Maybe this planet is composed of lighter materials," Slim hazarded, busy with the analysis of a sample of the outside air. "You can't always depend on size. Look at that little baby that balances Sirius. Smaller than the earth, and heavier than the sun."

"You look at it. How's the air?"

"Nineteen percent oxygen, and three percent carbon dioxide. The rest is helium, except for small quantities of some of the rarer gases found in our own atmosphere. Pressure, about seventeen pounds."

"Ought to be breathable," decided Ham. "Bring the torch."

He released the latches on the inner airlock door, while Slim produced the torch from a locker. The outer door followed, and in a minute they had jumped to the ground and were breathing the air of the new planet.

They wasted no time looking around them, but set out immediately to cover the short distance to the hive-like building. Slim was carrying the torch, with which they intended to burn their way inside; Ham was lugging a camera and a few dozen flash bulbs. They were about half-way to the structure when involuntarily both stopped dead in their tracks.

III

"I THOUGHT that was a rock!" exclaimed Ham, gazing in consternation at an object slightly to the right of their path. The object, about three feet in diameter and smoothly rounded, when they first sighted it, was now about five feet long and as thick through as Ham's thigh.

"Looks more like a worm to me," said

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Slim, judiciously. "Except that it's brown —although that could be sun-tan."

"Which end is which?" inquired Ham.

"Neither. A worm's the same on each end. You have to wait until it moves, and even then you might be fooled. It might be backing up."

But it became immediately apparent that this system, admittedly unreliable, was less than useless in the case at hand. For the worm moved, and in a quite unpredictable manner. Its opposite sides bulged and kept bulging until it resembled a four-pointed star-fish.

"It'll never get anywhere that way," was Ham's comment.

"Maybe it's not going anywhere. Maybe it wants to hear you make some more silly remarks. Come on."

"But suppose this is an intelligent creature?" suggested Ham. "Maybe we should try to communicate with it."

"Phooey! That's an ameba-like animal on the order of those creatures that infest the marshes of Venus, except for the healthy color and the larger size. They live sluggishly by ingesting nourishment from the grasses and other vegetation with which their bodies come in contact. Reproduce by fission."

"You seem well acquainted around here," Ham murmured.

But inasmuch as the strange creature seemed satisfied to retain his star-fish shape, and made no further effort to be entertaining, Ham decided that Slim was probably right, and the two resumed their former course.

They had taken only a few steps, when they were again brought up short. They both distinctly heard the word, "Wait!" They looked at each other, each thinking for a brief instant that the other had spoken. Then the answer dawned on them

"It was the worm!" Slim exclaimed.

"You mean the ameba-like creature," corrected Ham, sarcastically.

"Which is correct," informed the star-fish. "My composition is very similar to the picture your mind gives me of the ameba."

The two voyagers looked incredulously at the astounding creature. Their astonishment was due to the fact that they now realized the thing was causing the words to be formed in their minds, and making no audible sound while doing it.

Such an accomplishment had often been imagined, and indeed it was believed that certain men had abilities in that direction; but neither had ever encountered the phenomenon and the experience was eerie in the extreme.

"Did I hear you infer that you can read our minds?" Slim finally queried.

"NOT your ordinary thoughts," explained the ameba. "They are not strong enough to transmit themselves. But I do receive impressions when you speak, for the effort expended makes the waves stronger. And of course I can make my own thoughts strong enough to impress them on your primitive minds."

Slim turned to Ham. "I think he's pulling our collective leg. What could be more primitive than an ameba?"

"But there's nothing primitive about telepathy," Ham reminded.

"And I didn't say that I was an ameba," corrected the creature. "I merely said that I am similar to one. As a matter of fact, my people represent the evolution of that uni-cellular form carried out to the *n*th degree."

"Then you, personally, are not uni-cellular?" deduced Ham.

"No more than you are."

The star-fish stretched forth one of its members for their examination. "You will notice that my skin is of a rubbery nature, and quite tangible and opaque. The uni-cellular creature is transparent, and the outer covering is so tenuous that it readily allows food and moisture to pass through.

"The ameba, as such, is strictly limited as far as size is concerned. Its cell walls would break down from its own weight if it grew too much. So obviously I am constructed of many cells."

"Sounds reasonable," Slim admitted. "But if your skin is so tough, how do you

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eat? Or don't you need nourishment?"

Again one of the pseudopodia was thrust out, this time bottom side up. There were dozens of small openings on the under side of the member, some of them gaping and closing rhythmically.

The men shuddered involuntarily, for the whole thing looked very much like one of the arms of an octupus. Then, abruptly, all of the openings closed and the rubbery texture of the skin became smooth and unbroken.

"I was only demonstrating," explained the evolved ameba, apologetically. "The mouths are not there when I don't need them to admit food. Merely a multi-celled adaptation of the uni-cellular form. Even my brain is but the highly evolved replica of the nucleus of a primitive ameba."

"If it's not too much to ask," ventured Ham, "do you have, concealed somewhere about your person, a pair of eyes?"

"Nothing so complicated. Instead I see with every nerve on the surface of my body. It is by far the most simple and efficient visional apparatus, for I can see in all directions. All the nerve-ends are sensitive to light."

"Amazing," claimed Ham. "But how about . . ."

"Wait a minute," Slim broke in. "We're forgetting what we came here for. Maybe this gent knows the answer."

But before either man could put the question to the ameba, a feeling of acute alarm swept into their consciousness with such intensity that both cringed as if threatened with instant extinction. They knew that the sensation was caused by a similar feeling in their new acquaintance, but it was none the less real.

"RUN! . . . Run!" shrilled the next mental message. And run they did. There was no time wasted in looking about for danger.

Too many times in the course of their inter-planetary wanderings they had been in spots where instant flight was the only means of survival; they did not hesitate now.

But before they had covered half the distance to the space ship, an unseen blow from behind knocked them flat. Scrambling wildly to their feet, they fairly flew the rest of the way.

As they were about to leap for the edge of the airlock, Ham let out a yelp as he was again knocked down, this time more forceably than before. But Slim made the jump, lithely pulled his lanky body up, and turned in time to lend the other a hand.

Slamming the outer door, after hurriedly noting that the ameba was nowhere to be seen, they stood panting and trembling. Finally Ham, having caught his breath, chuckled at the ludicrous expression of fright on Slim's face.

"Funny, eh?" Slim panted. "I suppose you know what it's all about. What knocked us down, and what became of our pal . . . Come on, let me in on it."

Ham sobered and looked out of the nearest port. An empty plain stretched in all directions. Empty, that is, except for the mysterious building and the camera, flash bulbs and torch, which they had dropped when ordered to run. There was no sign of their recent acquaintance, the highly evolved ameba.

"I've sort of run out of ideas," he admitted, shakily.

It was a full hour later, and almost a full quart of Scotch whisky later, when Slim again voiced wonderment at the creature's strange absence from the landscape.

"I wonder what became of Jasper," said he.

Ham dwelt sadly on this mystery as he poured out the last of the Scotch. For several minutes the silence was broken only by the occasional liquid gurgle of a trickle of Haig and Haig passing an unsteady epiglottis.

Both men were mourning the disappearance, but for different reasons. Slim's mind was wholly filled with the lost opportunity for gaining some knowledge of the strange behavior of Propus; his friend had conceived a genuine—if slightly alco-

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holic—affection for the mission ameba.

"He seemed such a friendly sort of a critter," said Ham, half tearfully. "No harm in 'im a-tall."

"And so darned willing to oblige," supplemented Slim. "He was willing to tell all—if we had only been given time to ask him."

"And not only that," enlarged Ham, striding uncertainly toward one of the ports, "but he wasn't impolitely asking us a bunch of questions about our origin. And he must have been very curious about it, too. . . . Say!"

He broke off, attracted by something outside. "Come here, quick!"

Slim bounded to his feet, almost folded up, but managed to reach the bullet-like window. He arrived just in time to see a small rabbit, or something that looked like a rabbit, come to an untimely end. The animal had been chased, and overtaken, by a shadow.

At least it had seemed to be a shadow while it was in motion, but now as it stopped and engulfed the rabbit in its indefinable blackness, it looked more like a hole in the ground. It was impossible to focus the eyes on the thing.

SLIM blinked several times, thinking of the pernicious effects of alcohol on the optic nerve, but was still unable to determine anything about the blob of darkness other than the fact that it appeared to be about the size of the vanished creature he had called Jasper.

"I'll bet that's the jigger that bowled us over," he finally said, turning to Ham, who was futilely trying to coax a few more drops from the bottle.

"Wouldn't be surprised," sighed Ham, returning to the port for another look. "What do you think we should . . . Hey! It has went! What became of it?"

Slim again looked out, but saw nothing of the shadow and no sign of the unfortunate rabbit, if that's what it was.

He explained patiently that he had no part in the phenomenon and that the shadow had certainly been there when he looked away, and followed this intelligence with the suggestion that inasmuch as Propus was getting ready to set, it might be a good idea if they both sought relief from the harrowing memories of the day's happenings, by catching a little sleep.

Ham, with a solemn gravity reminiscent of the bottle, agreed wholeheartedly. Tomorrow, he averred, was another day.

Tomorrow, indeed, was another day; although as events progressed, it turned out to be quite as harrowing as the one it followed.

It was a good twelve hours after the setting of Propus that the first ruddy rays of the morning entered a port and moved to the point where they shone directly on Ham's face. He opened slitted eyes, sat erect and groaned.

But there was no time for him to collect his senses and realize to the fullest how terrible he felt, for a diversion occurred immediately. The light which had awakened him was shut off abruptly; and, quite startled, he got up to investigate.

The port in question was a good ten feet above the ground, and the ship was still situated in the middle of a treeless plain. That he was startled is easy to understand.

For nothing—except a cloud, which would have made the light dim gradually—should have been there to cast that shadow. Uneasy thoughts of the rabbit-killing menace of the night before coursed through his head as he peered out through the little window.

"Good morning," greeted a familiar voice.

"It's Jasper!" he muttered, incredulously. And then he saw the obstruction. It was, indeed, Jasper. And that personage was hovering, quite nonchalantly—as if such doings were a regular thing with him, which, of course, was altogether possible—a short distance above the window.

"I don't wish to disturb you," came the emanation. "But will you please let me come inside?"

Ham thought he detected a note of urgency in the message. He seemed to be

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experiencing, in a slighter degree, the same feeling of horror and fear that had preceded the attack of the day before. He made record time of opening the airlock, admitting the ameba, who floated eerily past him, and shutting it again.

"I was afraid you wouldn't awake in time," said Jasper, gently settling to the floor. "I was about to be attacked by one of the Mad Ones."

"Why didn't you wake us? Your thoughts seemed to penetrate the walls of the ship easily enough."

"Oh, I wouldn't have considered it! We Jaspers are very considerate of each other's privacy."

IV

HAM'S slightly blood-shot eyes widened perceptibly. Slim had referred to the ameba by that name Jasper, not knowing his real one, and now the critter had evidently accepted it for his own.

No . . . that wasn't it. The ameba hadn't used a name at all. He was using thoughts. And Ham's mind was automatically translating the thoughts into words, without even realizing it. And the word his mind had given him for the highly evolved ameba, and all of its kind, was naturally the same one he had mentally been using to designate him.

Further deductive reasoning along those lines was abruptly interrupted by a minor explosion from the direction of Slim's bed. That gentleman had begun to squirm and thrash about as the sound of the conversation penetrated his dim consciousness.

Suddenly he yelled in a fear-filled voice, "Get him offa me!" and sat up, looking a bit sheepish.

"Musta been something I et," he explained, looking with pleased surprise at Jasper. "What became of you last night?"

"I rose in the air, out of harm's way. My people utilize the principle of levitation as a normal function of our bodies."

"Amazing!"

"If you'll remember," suggested Ham, "this is your week to get the meals. Suppose you break out the tomato juice while I converse with our guest. By the way, Jasper, is there anything my friend can prepare for you? I don't know whether our sort of food would agree with you."

"Nothing, thank you. I have eaten my usual meal of grasses and require no more."

"Well—in that case let's get back to where we left off. You were about to be attacked by one of the Mad Ones. And what might they be?"

"They are really Jaspers like myself," informed the guest. "Except that they are changed in a horrible and irreversible way I'll tell you about it. A few hundred years ago, there was a very adventuresome Jasper who wanted to explore into the outer gaseous envelope of our luminary He protected himself with very strong walls of force surrounding his body, and set out to do this very thing.

"For ordinary travel in space he had taken more than sufficient precautions, for the force-screen he set up about himself was several times the intensity of the ones we Jaspers have been using for millions of years.

"But never before had we undertaken to approach a sun closely, let alone actually enter one. And evidently there was something lacking in his screen, admitting an unknown vibration; for a peculiar mutation occurred in both brain and body.

Jasper's thoughts appeared troubled for a moment, before his discourse continued.

"THIS wasn't noticed for some time after his return. But when he divided —we follow the same lines of development as the uni-cellular creature in regards to division by fission—the effects became at once apparent. The two smaller beings became almost invisible, reflecting only the infra-red vibrations, and absorbing all the higher ones.

"They also became carnivorous. An unheard-of thing, for we Jaspers respect the right of all living creatures to exist without interference. And to make this change even more horrible, the Mad Ones took to devouring their own brothers, when they

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were unable to find other animal food.

"They are becoming quite a problem, for since the mutation occurred they have multiplied at a much faster rate than normal Jaspers, and now number almost one-tenth of our population. And all of our ingenuity has failed to find a means of returning the Mad Ones to normal."

Slim looked thoughtfully over the rim of his glass of tomato juice.

"You mentioned 'brothers,'" he observed. "I can easily see how beings who reproduce as you do, would all be brothers —or perhaps fathers or uncles. Is that why it has never occurred to you to exterminate these Mad Ones?"

Jasper didn't answer immediately. Although he possessed no features with which to express emotion, it was evident that Slim's words had shocked him, and probably started a train of thought in an unexplored direction.

"I can see that such a course would be natural to a race of beings who developed under a more competitive environment," he finally said. "But you must understand that such a thing would be abhorrent to my people. We have never known strife; not even mild competition. We have never been faced with the need for fighting with any of the myriad forms of life with which we have come in contact.

"Whenever a Jasper is attacked by a carniverous life-form, he merely rises and moves to a place where he is safe. So naturally the instinct to kill when menaced has never been developed in us."

"You wouldn't even fight when you know that eventually these Mad Ones will multiply to the point where the planet will be uninhabitable for you?"

"I'm afraid not. I know that I could not kill a Mad One, even if he were eating me. And therefore no other Jasper could, for we are all alike."

"That certainly is a sad state of affairs," Slim commiserated. "And it looks as if nothing we could think of would be of any help. We're too barbaric."

"Without any intention of offending, I'm afraid you are. And it is not likely that you could help solve the problem in the only way acceptable to us—that of correcting the mutation. For our civilization is millions of years older than yours, and we have spent that time profitably, not in war and strife. And so our minds are much better equipped to reason logically.

"Yet we have failed. Therefore, let us drop the subject and return to the point where we were interrupted yesterday."

The two men looked blankly at each other.

"You were going to tell me what you came here for," supplied Jasper. "You said, 'Maybe this gent knows the answer.'"

Slim grinned broadly and then proceeded to expound volubly on the solar system's metabolism trouble.

"We Jaspers were afraid of that," said the ameba.

"Then you know what caused the phenomenon. Tell us."

"WE CAUSED it," admitted Jasper. "In fact we caused your race to come into existence, though of course we didn't plan it that way. I'll explain.

"Millions of years past, when the pulsations of our luminary were of much shorter duration, my race came into conscious existence. The property of levitation was ours even then, and to that gift is given credit for our rapid advancement in becoming sentient beings.

"For as we became larger and multicelled, we could avoid the terrible heat of our sun, during its intense periods, by flying through the air and continually keeping on the night side of the planet.

"This enabled the race to continue its mental development, while lesser creatures were forced to go into periods of hibernation when the sun was hot, and spend all of their time stuffing themselves with food when the sun was cool. Our periods of flying became periods of study and mental communion, during which great advancement took place."

"Pardon me a moment," Slim interrupted. "You mean that you flew for days

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at a time, keeping pace with the planet's rotation? Wouldn't that require a terrific amount of energy?"

"Quite the contrary. Our levitation mechanism operates on the same principle as the gravity drive of your ship. And it takes almost no energy to maintain a warp in the gravitational lines of force of a planet. The chief difference lies in the fact that the mechanism is a normal bodily function with us.

"But to continue. As time went on, and our population increased, it became apparent that new worlds would have to be found. At that time our numbers were doubling—by division, of course—every hundred years, and it was estimated that before another ten thousand years had passed, this planet would become uncomfortably crowded.

"And it was decided that we would choose, for the overflow, a world in some solar system where it would not be necessary continually to dodge the waxing periods of a pulsating sun.

"Such a world we thought we had found in your own planet. But we knew that your sun gave off but few of the emanations that made life possible to us. I refer to the cosmic rays. Accordingly we set up a tremendous projector at our south pole, which always faces toward your system, to compensate for the deficiency.

"It was necessary to make this projector powerful enough to manufacture many times the quantity of rays that any one Cepheid emits. This, of course, to compensate for the greater distance.

"We were still faced with the problem of taking care of our immediate increase, for it would be many times ten thousand years before your planet would be suitable for us.

"But, tragically, nature solved the problem for us. There came an extended period of volcanic activity on this planet which resulted in the deaths of thousands and thousands of Jaspers. Our population fell off considerably, rather than increasing. But eventually normal circumstances returned and once again we multiplied.

"After a few million years it was decided that your planet should have by then developed the proper sort of plant life to support our race, and accordingly an expedition was sent out to investigate.

"But something had gone wrong. The earth was found to be inhabited by many forms of giant reptilian life, some of them carnivorous. The whole project was therefore a failure. The world was obviously unsuited to us. It was then necessary—"

"WHOA there!" Slim again interrupted. "You said the expedition found gigantic reptiles. The age of saurians was way back in the Triassic and Jurassic periods, almost two hundred million years ago."

"Oh yes. The projector was built long before that—somewhere in the Carboniferous era!"

"Well why didn't you shut the thing off, once you saw that the earth was covered with the reptiles?" Ham wanted to know.

"But we couldn't do that!" exclaimed the ameba, sounding a bit horrified. "The reptiles required the rays, and to cease sending them would have been murder."

"And we invent such words as 'altruism,'" was Ham's mumbled comment.

"But the projector was no drain on our resources or our time," Jasper said deprecatingly. "It required no effort to maintain, for it operated by transforming useless emanations of our sun into the desired ones."

"But what finally caused it to cease functioning?" inquired Slim.

"The Mad Ones turned it off. Why, I can't say, for in the vicinity of the machine there is an abundance of game, which they value. But they are quite irrational, and it is useless to conjecture on their motives. Several of my people have made attempts to start the mechanism, fearing that its failure might be causing suffering on your system; but each time they were driven away by the voracious Mad Ones."

Slim looked at Ham and screwed his face into a ludicrous expression of thought-

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fulness. After several minutes of this, he evidently came to a momentous decision.

"It looks as if we had better take a trip to the south pole," he announced. "And the sooner, the quicker."

Ham, who had also been giving the matter some thought, saw a few objections.

"And if the place is crawling with Jasper's demented relatives, what do you propose to do? I've always been superstitious about being eaten. Don't think I'd like it—nohow!"

"Contrariwise!" supplemented Slim. "I don't intend to be eaten. I've got an idea."

"Most anything can happen now. All right, you start the ship, and our pal will show the way. Won't you, Jasper?"

"Of course," agreed the ameba. "But I don't see how . . ."

"NATURALLY not. Beings with your finer instincts couldn't possibly think the things I'm thinking. But let's see if my idea isn't okay. You said that the Mad Ones reflect only infra-red from the surfaces of their bodies. And absorb all the visual light vibrations.

"My deduction is therefore, that such beings would not be able to stand much light. It would burn them up, inasmuch as light which is absorbed becomes heat. Am I right so far?"

"Yes, I believe you are. The Mad Ones are almost entirely nocturnal creatures. They never come out in the full light of day, and only occasionally in the late afternoon, when the rays of Propus are red and weak."

He hesitated. "But if you are contemplating the use of light rays to kill them, I think I would rather not have anything to do with such an undertaking."

"But I assure you, my dear Jasper, I am by nature as gentle as a lamb. Which reminds me—I was bitten by a lamb once. But he, of course, was a very vicious lamb.

"Here is the situation: We, as humans, wish to start up the cosmic ray apparatus. And that is just what we intend to do. Now, if, in the act of so doing we are attacked by anybody at all, we must defend ourselves. Self-preservation is the first law of nature.

"To you, that takes the form of flight. But inasmuch as we are not endowed with the gift of levitation, we would have to fight to defend ourselves. And, knowing what we might have to fight, we would naturally prepare ourselves accordingly.

"Now that doesn't sound like premeditated murder, does it? We certainly are not asking them to attack us. In fact, we will got out of our way to avoid them."

There was a long minute of silence while Jasper weighed the finer moral aspects of the situation. He finally came to a decision, but it was not so much Slim's words as his own sense of responsibility which was the balancing factor.

On Slim's line of reasoning alone, he would still have refrained from having any hand in an act which might result in violence. But there was the annoying thought that the beings of the solar system were suffering because of a condition which was the direct responsibility of his race. And, in all justice, he must make sacrifices to help them.

Even if it meant going counter to his own moral convictions.

In a few minutes the ship was silently winging its way southward. Slim was at the controls, with Jasper hovering at his shoulder, while Ham was busily hooking small atomic generators to a pair of powerful searchlights. When he was finished, he tried them out, producing a light to rival the sun in brilliance, but still he seemed a bit dissatisfied.

He stood surveying his handiwork for a minute, decided the lights were too heavy for easy carrying, and set about to correct the fault by attaching leather straps.

Suddenly he stopped work, partially paralyzed by an idea. "Say!" he erupted. "What are we bothering with these lights for? Why not do our dirty work in the full light of day, about noon, when the Mad Ones are under cover?"

"Because there isn't any full light of day," Slim informed. "The place we are headed for is the south pole, and as you

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should have noticed, this planet rotates on an axis perpendicular to the plane of the ecliptic.

"Which means, of course, that the south pole region has a night and day of the same duration as at the equator, but receives very little light, even at high noon. Therefore, the Mad Ones are able to travel around without any discomfort all day long."

Ham went back to work, muttering to himself. There was one more thing he wanted to know, but he would be darned if he'd say anything and give Slim a chance to pop out the answer in his superior manner. But Jasper came to the rescue without being asked.

V

"I SUPPOSE you have both been wondering why this planet does not possess the usual polar ice-caps that would be expected on a planet so far from its luminary," he telepathed.

"The reason has to do with our failure to find a suitable world to colonize. I told you that shortly after setting up the cosmic ray projector we were subjected to a long period of intense volcanic activity. This had two effects. Vast quantities of carbon dioxide were released, causing the average temperature of the planet to rise. And the added heat caused prolific vegetable growths, most of them unsuitable for our consumption."

Jasper waxed happily professorial.

"So abundant was the undesirable plant life that it choked out most of the sort of vegetable food we require. As a result, and this in spite of our decreased numbers, there came a shortage of food.

"To beings of our sort, however, this is not really serious, for when we eat less, we merely lessen our bodily activity. And we found it very easy to do this, for the volcanoes caused a thick cloud blanket to cover the planet, nullifying the pulsations of Propus, and removing the necessity for our periodic flying excursions.

"But perhaps the greatest result of the activity was to teach us that we needn't ever multiply to such numbers that the planet cannot hold us. For with the lessened food consumption and lessened activity we found that our division period was lengthened to more than a thousand years.

"And inasmuch as our mental keenness was not impaired by slowing down our bodily activity, it was decided to continue at the new rate, even after food became plentiful."

"How about the sun's pulsations, after the volcanic activity had ceased?" Ham inquired.

"We had learned our lesson," replied Jasper. "And thereafter we took steps to control our climate so that all portions of the planet are ideal for our own existence. It was simply a matter of providing means of controlling the amount of suspended dust particles in the atmosphere, and the proper percentage of carbon dioxide.

"That is why we have no terrifically hot torrid zone, and also no polar ice-caps. The machinery for maintaining this ideal climate is housed in those hemispherical structures you were so curious about, and is completely automatic and self-repairing."

THE ship terminated its swift flight in a land of broad plains covered by dense, but stunted, shrubbery. The light of Propus was dim and reddish, coming from such an oblique angle that it lost most of its brightness in the thick blanket of atmosphere through which it passed.

Slim set the ship down a short distance from a structure similar in general appearance to the one they had intended to cut into the day before. This one, Jasper assured them, contained the cosmic ray projector.

It differed from the other buildings in two respects. For one thing, it had a small opening in its lower rim—left there, Jasper told them, so that they could gain entrance to make adjustments in the apparatus.

He explained that while this planet would continue to face its south pole to-

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ward the solar system for many ages to come, there was a slow, continual shift taking place, which necessitated correcting the aim of the projector every few millions of years.

The other difference was that the upper portion of the dome was made of a darker colored substance—a better conductor of the rays, they were informed.

Once outside of the ship, Ham strapped one of the lights on Slim's chest, and showed him where to turn on the switch. Slim, in turn, strapped the other on Ham.

There were no blobs of shadow in sight, and they decided that the Mad Ones were temporarily elsewhere. But to warn them of any unexpected attack, Jasper hovered in the air behind them as they headed for the opening in the structure. His brain, keen in telepathic reception, could pick up the jumbled thoughts of the Mad Ones, long before the two men could detect their presence by the sense of sight.

And besides acting as lookout, it was necessary for him to go along to start the machinery of the projector. He had decided against attempting to explain its intricacies, so that they could do it themselves.

But short as the distance to the building was, and clear of menace as the plain seemed to be, there was nevertheless plenty of time for distant Mad Ones to detect their presence and propel themselves to the spot. Like Jasper, they could attain terrific speeds.

The trio had barely gone twenty feet when Slim and Ham were again almost knocked senseless from the intensity of the horror emanations from Jasper's agitated mind.

"Protect yourselves!" he shrilled, the terror thoughts waning and in their stead coming sensations of urgency and desperation.

The two men whirled and darted their eyes all over the landscape, trying to see the shadows that would reveal the Mad Ones. Possibly only a few seconds passed until they saw the inky blobs, hurtling toward them, but those seconds were stretched into minutes by their terrified minds.

But if their brains were temporarily paralyzed by the strength of Jasper's emotions, the condition didn't continue once they had sighted the enemy.

Twin beams of blinding light centered on the nearer of the shadows. When it struck them, clearly outlining their dead-black forms, they seemed to shrivel, hesitate for an instant, and madly plummet to the ground below.

"It works!" Ham exulted. "You're a genius, my boy—albeit a stupid sort of genius." He felt obliged to temper the praise a bit, considering how easily Slim's head was apt to enlarge.

But he had spoken too soon. It became apparent that there were quite a few of the shadows still on the way, and that some of these had evidently retained enough intelligence to see the danger in the searchlights.

For Ham saw out of the corner of his eye several black streaks fly off to the left of the main body. Divining their purpose, he frantically swerved and caught several of them in the beam from his lamp; but even as he saw them fall, he realized that in the moment that he must hold the beam on them, others were escaping off at a tangent. In a minute they would be coming from all directions.

"Head back for the ship, Slim," he urged. "They're flanking us!"

SLIM needed no coaxing. He had seen those oblique streaks of black and had come to the same conclusion. Grimly the two men strode along, hampered by the necessity of keeping the heavy searchlights continually swerving to catch those of the Mad Ones who were tearing in from the sides.

Sometimes one or the other of them would suddenly whirl and face the rear, warned by some mysterious sense that some of the enemy had managed to circle them.

And each time this occurred they would be rewarded by the sight of one or more

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of the inky blobs shriveling and dropping. The thought never occurred to them in the heat of the battle, that those warnings could hardly be part of their own sensory equipment. But as it became increasingly apparent that they never could fend off the menacing Mad Ones long enough to reach the safety of the ship, the source of the warnings made itself known.

Unexpectedly, each man felt a constricting band tighten around his waist and abruptly jerk him off his feet. Both thought the same thing—that one of the Mad Ones had finally reached them. They struggled frantically to free themselves, as the unseen being lifted them through the air.

"It is I," came the reassuring tones of Jasper. "Keep the lights working, or they may get us yet."

But in spite of the almost invisible rapidity of their dartings, the searchlights kept the menacing shadows at bay. Several times Jasper was forced to swing one of the men suddenly outward, to let him get a shot at one of the blobs attacking from above; but such was the coordination between ameba and man, made possible by Jasper's mental equipment, that every attempt by the Mad Ones was frustrated.

Once inside the ship, Slim slumped down at the controls.

"Where do we go from here, boys?" he queried.

"We might learn how to build one of those projectors," Ham suggested. "Jasper could give us the dope."

"Where, stupid?"

"Why . . . How about Pluto? That's far enough out that a wide-angle projector would cover the rest of the system."

Slim snorted his disgust. "Pluto turns on its axis. How could you keep it aimed?"

Ham pondered this, discarded it; thought up some more ideas, and discarded them too. He was reduced to mentally kicking himself for having voiced a half-baked idea for Slim to scoff at, when suddenly he thought of another, and put it into words without thinking.

"Say!" he exploded. "Suppose we *had* managed to start that contraption. What was there to stop the Mad Ones from turning it off again?"

"Nothing except that I intended to seal the door over after we came out. The Mad Ones are too concerned with the business of finding raw meat to be bothered going to the trouble of breaking in. They weren't after us because we wanted to turn on the projector. All they wanted was a meal."

HAM paced the floor nervously. Slim continued to slump. Jasper said nothing and did nothing. Ham, glancing at him, decided he looked more like an oversized sofa pillow than an animate being. But then, you couldn't expect the guy to come out with an idea of how to murder his own relatives.

His glance then strayed idly to the medicine chest. His eyes lighted up avidly. With a quick stride, he reached the cabinet and jerked open the door.

Slim was too far gone in the doldrums even to raise his head at the sound of a familiar gurgle. But he roused himself at the satisfied *aaah* which followed.

"Where did you get that?" he wanted to know.

"Medicinal purposes, old chap," explained Ham. "I'm sick. In fact I almost got et. That's enough to make anybody sick."

"I'm sick too," declared Slim, reaching for the bottle.

Fortunately it was only an eight-ounce bottle. If it had been a quart, it would have probably had the usual effect of putting the pair of them asleep. Jasper, of course, didn't drink.

And if it had been a quart, and they had gone to sleep, then Ham wouldn't have become talkative, and Slim wouldn't have given birth to his prize idea. Such a catastrophe would very likely have changed the course of history on two solar systems.

But, as the chronicle has already recorded, it was an eight-ounce bottle. And Ham did become talkative.

At first he merely marveled that a ma-

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chine that was potentially capable of operating for millions of years was stilled merely because they couldn't cross a few feet of ground to start it up.

From that his verbal wanderings progressed to wonderment at the methods used to supply power to run the machine all those millions of years. He had completely forgotten Jasper's explanation of that point.

Then he began to reminisce. In the course of which he covered much ground on the subject of power.

"Do you remember," he asked, "back before atomic power was developed?"

"Before my time," Slim grunted, somewhat annoyed.

He was in no mood to be tolerant toward Ham's lapses.

"I'm referring," Ham enlarged, "to the time just before atomic power was harnessed, and shortly after they learned to transmit tight beams of radio power. That was when the Sun Power Company made fortunes for a half-dozen men who had vision. They bought up a vast stretch of jungle land in South America, right on the equator, installed half a million selenium light-gatherers, on poles, and broadcast the power all over the world. Made a fortune selling the receivers.

"But the clever thing about the idea was the way they managed to put power production on a twenty-four hour basis. Broadcasting power from the sun after the sun had set!"

Slim, who had again sunk into a sort of apathy after guzzling his half of the bottle's contents, suddenly snapped to attention. Ham, not noticing, droned on.

"Yeah, that was pretty clever," he repeated. "Hiring two space ships—they were rockets then, too—and having them set up an orbit so that a light-reflecting screen, stretched between them, would send the sun's rays down to make daylight on the night side of the planet. They used to stay there a month at a time, conserving power by dissipating the screen when the sun was shining directly on the Amazon territory."

SLIM, by this time, was on his feet, striding toward a door which led into the ship's laboratory and work-shop. Jasper, suddenly come to life, floated after him. Ham, a bit bewildered but determined not to show it, followed in their footsteps.

Slim was already at work with a slide rule and a book of logarithms. After a few minutes he stopped, cupped chin in palm, and frowned. Ham was no less bewildered; but Jasper seemed quite aware of what was in Slim's mind.

"Power?" he inquired.

"Yes," answered Slim. "It would take more than this ship could produce. I would want a screen a lot bigger than the one those Sun Power lads used."

"Why?" asked Ham, suddenly realizing what they were talking about. "You only need a screen big enough to bathe this particular region, say a mile on all sides, with the full rays of Propus. And while you are up there maintaining the screen, I'll be down here turning on the projector and fusing the doorway shut. Simple, eh?"

"Goofy would be a better word," Slim asserted. "Where would you be while I am going up to erect the screen?"

Ham's face fell. "Et, I suppose," he said, lamely.

But Jasper, who had been indulging in quite a bit of thought along lines foreign to him before meeting these two representatives of a more primitive civilization, decided to take a hand in the discussion.

"Why did you wish to make a screen larger than the one suggested by your friend?" he inquired.

Slim looked steadily at the ameba.

"Jasper, old son, I think you know the answer to that. It was my hope that I could erect a screen, a curved screen, so huge in area that it would bathe the entire night side of this planet with intense sunlight. The thing is possible, too, with enough power. I wanted to exterminate every damned one of those Mad Ones."

"Why, may I ask?" the ameba calmly insisted.

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"You may," returned Slim. "Though I think you know the answer to that also. It was because I think you Jaspers are too danged fine a race of beings to be killed off. And that's just what will happen eventually, if the Mad Ones are allowed to continue in existence.

"While your people are living sedate lives, curtailing your rate of divison so that the planet will not become over-populated, these creatures are madly thinking of nothing but their carnivorous appetites. And dividing at a terrific pace!

"You have deliberately understated the plight of your people, but I managed to see through your pretense that a reckoning was far in the future. It is imminent!

"Your doom is on top of you. How else could you unconsciously emit such a strong feeling of horror at the presence of one of the Mad Ones? At first I thought it was a revulsion at the thought of cannibalism, but the last time it was much too strong to be merely that.

"And yet, in spite of that horror, you forced yourself to stay with us and help us out when the pinch came, even to swinging us around to get a shot at the enemy. Say, old boy, did you realize you were fighting? Well, after the way you acted, even if you had the instincts of a wild boar, I would want to do something for you. That's why I wanted to set up the big screen."

VI

JASPER evidently required some time to digest all this, for he ventured no comment. Ham, usually voluble, was shocked into temporary silence by the sudden realization that ever since Jasper had explained the nature of the Mad Ones earlier in the day, he had been unconsciously puzzled by hazy, nebulous thoughts about the ultimate fate of the amebas.

Even then his mind had been toying with the memory of the soul-chilling emanations the ameba had loosed on the night previous. But it had taken Slim's keen insight to make those thoughts concrete.

"Say, Jasper," Ham finally exploded. "You were saying something about your people never being required to fight any other forms of life in the past. You just rose in the air and fled.

"But just the same your flight was an expression of a universal instinct called self-preservation. And maybe when flight won't do you any good, you'll forget your principles and do what any other form of life does when it's cornered.

"My personal opinion is that you only think you could stand being eaten by a Mad One without trying to fight back. I figure that as individuals you Jaspers will fight when the time comes.

"The only trouble is that when the time comes that you can no longer run it will be because the Mad Ones have multiplied to the extent that they will begin to pick you off, one at a time, by ganging on you.

"What I'm getting at is that if I'm right, and your people will be forced by the instinct of self-preservation to fight when you are ultimately cornered, why can't you push the calendar ahead a little bit and do your fighting now, collectively while there is still time to save yourselves? You'll do it in the end, anyway, in spite of your finer instincts—but it'll be too late then."

The two men looked at Jasper expectantly but once again he declined to answer.

For a brief moment they fancied there was some mysterious aura surrounding the ameba. There was an electric tensity in the air that made the silence seem tangible. For a short space they imagined the air shimmered and waved about the brown figure.

But the impression lasted only an instant, and Jasper became the same inscrutable being he always was. His smooth body was devoid of a revealing feature to indicate the workings of his mind. The incongruous thought passed fleetingly through Ham's mind that the ameba had the ideal equipment for playing poker. He had something better than a poker face. He had no face at all.

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"It'll be too late then," repeated Jasper, absently. "We must find out!"

This made no particular sense to either of the men, nor did Jasper's following actions. He rose slowly from the floor, as if reluctant to continue, and floated toward the airlock. He hesitated over the spot where the men had dropped the powerful searchlights when they had dashed into the ship.

Then abruptly four pseudopodia thrust forth and grasped the two lamps, while a fifth reach out to open the door.

"Remain inside, please," he said, and swung the door inward just far enough to let himself through. It slammed shut before any of the Mad Ones even noticed it had been opened.

AS ONE man, Ham and Slim rushed to the nearest porthole. At first there was nothing to be seen. Jasper was not yet in their range of vision, and the reddish-gray landscape was broken only by an occasional hazy blot, marking the spot where one of the Mad Ones had fallen in the recent skirmish.

Floating in the air were still a few who had not been struck by the light beams; but evidently the majority had moved on in quest of easier prey.

Presently Jasper came in sight as he moved slowly away from the ship; and simultaneously with his appearance two of the hovering Mad Ones plummeted toward him. Twin beams of blinding light met them half-way and down they dropped, seared inwardly by the converted heat from the rays.

Jasper evidently didn't invite further attack, for he retreated toward the ship.

Ham dashed to the door to let him in, then stepped back as Jasper floated slowly past him and deposited the lamps on the floor. Neither he nor Slim spoke when Jasper silently descended to rest beside the searchlights. Both knew that they had witnessed a momentous event.

For Jasper had, without even the driving urge of self-perservation, actually wreaked violence on a living creature. The experience must have shaken him to the core.

"Gentlemen." Jasper finally broke the silence. "My people have come to a decision. I have purposely refrained from telling you this, but ever since your ship entered our atmosphere you have been under observation. And ever since you began to inspect my body, your thoughts have gone forth to all of my race.

"I lied when I said that only when you spoke could I hear your thought vibrations. You would have realized that if you had remembered how long my people have been communicating by this means. The deception was advisable, for if you had known your mind was being probed, you would have been uneasy and suspicious.

"At first we were merely interested in you as two intrepid travelers, exploring a new world. We are great space-people ourselves, and took a kindly interest in you. But before long your thoughts began to stir up something in our placid egos.

"You thought primitive thoughts. Struggle and competition seemed to be the very essence of your existence. Your determination to find a way to restore the decreased rate of metabolism in your people interested us.

"To us, who have lived for millions of years in blissful tranquility, our needs foreseen and provided for without effort, so slothful that we could face our own destruction with equanimity, you—to use your own idiom—started something.

"Possibly it was an eon-long submerged racial vitality coming to the surface; some vital urge dating back before the conscious life of the race; something from the days when our uni-celled ancestors struggled in the primal slime of this planet—but your vigorous thoughts of self-perpetuation have stirred a similar urge in us.

"We have come to a decision. We shall throw off this slothful inertia which has gripped us for so long, and destroy the Mad Ones before they destroy us!"

SLIM jumped to his feet with a whoop and grabbed the extended hand of a gleeful Ham. Then they turned to Jasper

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with the full intention of slapping him on the shoulder, but this being obviously impractical, they just stood and grinned.

"But before this decision was made," the ameba continued, "it was necessary to determine whether or not a Jasper was capable of killing. Your argument that we would do it anyway, after it was too late, had to be tested. It was, therefore, suggested that I try it.

"As I once told you, we are alike in our reactions: if it were possible for me to force myself to do violence, then it would be equally possible for us all to do the necessary thing. And as you saw, I killed.

"You have shown us the way. We shall erect the screen—our mastery of vibration will make it simple—and maintain it until the last of the Mad Ones is dead. We can do this without regret, brothers though they may be, for we know that their state of mentality has fallen below that of the beast.

"Those of the present generation are conscious of but one thing, their appetites. They have no other mental pursuits, so we are fortifying ourselves with the thought that to kill them is no more a crime against our principles than killing the plant life which we use for food.

"We wish to assure you that this is to be accomplished immediately; and as soon as it is done, the cosmic ray projector will be restored to operation.

"Now I must request that you start your homeward journey at once. The thing we are about to do is to us a shameful act, for all its necessity, and we would rather it not be witnessed."

The two earth dwellers, however, saw nothing shameful or degrading about an act of self-preservation; and accordingly, like Lot's wife, looked back. In fact, they did more than look back. They stopped the ship well out of sight of any of the intellectual beings of Propus' second planet, and trained a telescope on it.

Their point of view, it became apparent, was perfect. They had taken off from a point directly at the south pole of a world of the Jaspers, and were afforded a vision of the complete southern hemisphere. The day side of the planet was a brilliant crescent, vivid in detail, while the night side was a somber shadowy world.

The Jaspers were as good as their word. After a few minutes of watching it became evident that the work was already begun.

Slim, working frantically at the adjustment knobs on the telescope, brought into focus a vast cloud, its edges wavering and constantly changing, rising from a point on the lighted side of the planet.

Gradually the telescope brought the image closer and defined it more clearly.

Ham gasped as it became apparent that the cloud was composed of millions of Jaspers, rocketing through space at a terrific speed. Neither man had expected anything like this. They had expected to wait several days before anything happened, while the Jaspers constructed machinery to accomplish their purpose.

But obviously these beings were too advanced to require any such crude methods. They would make the necessary light-reflecting screen by direct manipulation of the energies thrown off by their sun, Propus. Each individual would do his part in constructing the vast reflector.

THE cloud approached a point several millions of miles above the dark side of the planet; and as it did the Jaspers which composed it began to diverge, taking paths away from the center of the cloud.

The two men scarcely breathed as they watched the magnificence of the spectacle. Each Jasper was taking his position as if with rehearsed precision. The whole formed a pattern millions of miles across. If lines could have been drawn through the tiny points in the pattern the result would have resembled a circular spider's web of almost unimaginable proportions.

Abruptly the two men slitted their eyes as the vast design flashed into blinding light. Each Jasper, utilizing the accumulated knowledge of a civilization old beyond human conception, was throwing off his portion of that huge mirror.

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The darkness below was suddenly turned into blazing day. The reflector was steady, motionless; and the two men knew that it would be maintained that way until every Mad One had given up the ghost.

Swiftly Slim pointed the telescope toward the ground below. But as quickly as he manipulated its controls, even quicker had been the action of the light.

Scattered from pole to equator were evidences that the menace of the Mad Ones was no more. Several times the telescope caught images of animals of varying sizes, dead and partially devoured; and each time they saw the shriveled remains of Mad Ones stricken in the middle of their carnivorous repasts.

At length the two men turned from the telescope and started the ship on its swift journey homeward.

Ham, a few minutes later, was struck with a familiar urge and began to rummage through the supply lockers. He wasn't exactly disappointed when he didn't find any Scotch.

"Some sight, wasn't it?" he remarked.

"Sure was," admitted Slim, bending over a sheaf of charts. "We ought to get a bonus for starting the ball a-rolling."

No answer. Silence, in fact—which was a thoroughly unnatural reaction to the mention of increased emolument. Somewhat alarmed, Slim looked up from the charts. And his alarm was not mitigated by what he saw.

Ham had found a bottle—a pint one, with the amber approximation of one slug of Scotch at the bottom. Yet he had apparently forgotten it; was, in fact, standing rigid, holding the bottle without seeing it. On his face was an expression of deep bereavement.

"For Propus' sake!" Slim exploded. "What's happened now? Who's died? Gimme that—"

Ham shook his head mournfully. "I was just thinking of Jasper. Nicest little gent you'd care to meet on any planet. I guess I'm going to kind of miss him."

"Oh that." Slim started a laugh. "Why he's just—" He paused, nodded. "Yeah," he finished lamely. "Yeah . . . me too."

And then it came, like a faint music seeping into their minds. Like a memory, distinct but impalpable. "Are my rays strong enough, earth-gentlemen? We are grateful to you, and I personally shall miss you very much."

The two earth-gentlemen stared at each other, nodded slowly in unison. It was the McCoy.

"And now that things are already back to normal on your planet, I have begun to think how pleasant it would be to visit you there. Perhaps, at some future time, it would not be impossible. Meanwhile . . ."

Ham raised the bottle to his lips, drank exactly half a slug. Bowed profoundly.

And passed the other half-slug over to Slim.

Mother Earth sang happily in her course.

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By JONATHAN STAGGE

I stared into the safe—the horoscope had been stolen

The Stars Spell Death

Start now this magnificent new novel of mystery and peril ordained by the flaming symbols of the zodiac

THERE is nothing in particular to worry the widowed rural doctor, Hugh Westlake, except the fact that his twelve-year-old daughter, Dawn, has her heart set on a new and expensive car. Nothing, that is, until Dr. Westlake receives a telephone summons one night to an automobile accident.

On the road the doctor's car runs out of gas. Westlake (who is telling the story) proceeds on foot down the lonely country road—to discover a wrecked automobile, with a dead man at the wheel. Then the doctor begins to notice the incredible details of the tragedy: the license plates, the clothes on the dead man, the letters in his pockets—all belong to Hugh Westlake. And the face of the corpse has been so disfigured as to be unrecognizable.

WESTLAKE'S old friend, Inspector Cobb, identifies the body as that of a wanted criminal; he points out that the man may have planned to disappear by impersonating the doctor. Yet it is clear that the inspector is not satisfied with the explanation; and at length he tells Westlake his further discovery. That same night a farmer passed a car drawn up catty-cornerwise across the road, and a woman standing beside it asked him if he was Dr. Westlake. This, then, may have been the "accident" to which the doctor was summoned; it looks strangely like an attempt to abduct him, leaving behind the other wrecked car, the disfigured corpse in Westlake's clothes.

This story began in last week's Argosy

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A few days later Dr. Westlake has an unexpected visitor, a girl he has never seen before. She is Sydney Train—engaged, she says, to Robin Barker. Slowly the doctor begins to see the connections. Robin Barker is a cousin of his whom he has not seen in years; the young man's father was a celebrated chemist, and he left Westlake in charge of his estate until Robin should come of age. And in a few weeks, Sydney Train says, Robin will be twenty-one.

THEN she relates her amazing story. Robin, a brilliant chemist himself, has inexplicably thrown up a good job with his fiancée's father, and refuses to see her. Moreover, he is continually in the company of certain mysterious foreigners; and a detective hired by Sydney Train has overheard one of them say: "We'll have to work through this man, Westlake. There's nothing against eliminating him." The speaker bears a purple birthmark on his face; his companion has a wrestler's build.

To make the puzzle more fantastic, Sydney Train professes a complete faith in astrology. Robin's father, she knows, had also believed in the stars; and now she begs Dr. Westlake to bring out the papers of the Barker estate. With the will they find Robin Barker's horoscope, cast in German by Maxinus. It makes this prophesy: Within a month of his twenty-first birthday Robin Barker will almost certainly be murdered, and his nearest male relative will also die. That relative is Hugh Westlake. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

CODICIL TO A STAR

HER hand was still on my sleeve. We stood there in the flickering candlelight, very close together in a sort of unconscious intimacy. The smooth curve of her neck, where the borrowed robe had slipped, caught a faint ruddy glow from the fire. Her lips, still half parted as her last words had left them, were very soft and red.

For those few moments it was almost as though we were lovers instead of a man and a girl who until that night had never seen each other and who, speaking for myself at least, distrusted each other intensely.

I said at length: "So Robin is going to be murdered and I tag along as his nearest male relative. Quaint sense of humor that astrologer pal of yours has!"

"It's stupid to laugh at the truth." Her hand slipped from my arm. "Because it is true. If Maxinus sees it in the stars, it must be true."

I gripped her small shoulders, feeling the warm skin beneath the stuff of the robe. I swung her around so that she was facing me again. "You came here because you wanted something out of me, didn't you? And for some reason of your own you're trying to scare me with all this bogey-bogey business. Well, I'm sorry, but I'm not that sort of a sucker. Suppose you cut the trimmings and tell me what you really want."

"What I really want?" A little furrow of perplexity slid between her eyes. "You think—no, you can't think that. I'm not hiding anything. I'm not trying to scare you. I'm only telling you what it says in the horoscope."

"Then you really believe that junk?"

"Of course I believe it." She tossed her head impatiently. "It was true about Robin's past and heavens knows it's starting to be horribly true about the present. I know there's danger for Robin right now. I've sensed it and seen it. And I told you what those men in Chicago said about you, too."

She paused, watching me almost with contempt. "You men are all the same. You think it's wonderful and he-man not to believe in intangibles. But you won't be thinking that way much longer—not when things begin to happen."

"Perhaps from your infinite store of zodiacal wisdom you can tell me exactly when to expect my slaughter. Would it be a Tuesday or a Friday afternoon?"

"Of course you can't be that definite. You don't understand. The stars only show the way things are most likely to happen. That's why astrology is so marvelous. If you know of the danger beforehand, it's possible to deflect it. Sometimes it's possible to avoid it altogether. Not always, of course, but it is possible."

That seemed the last straw of casuistry.

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I asked: "Then you suggest that Robin and I should buckle down and do some high-power deflecting on this murder of ours?"

"Of course you must." Her voice was deadly earnest. "You are surrounded by dangerous forces and you have to be terribly careful—both you and Robin. You must never be off your guard for a single moment until the period of danger is over."

"And the mystic period is—when?"

"Within a month of Robin's twenty-first birthday, it says. That's the time when the stars are most unfavorable. The month before and the month after."

"And when is Robin's birthday?"

"Didn't you know? It's the nineteenth of April. Ten days from today."

I'D HAD no idea it was so close. That came as a genuine surprise. My mind immediately went back to that "accident" on Mill Lane. That had happened within this so-called danger period. If Cobb's crazy theory had any sense in it, the danger had been very real for me then. And it had been deflected only by a hairbreadth.

"I'd better get police protection," I said drily. "I suggest you get the Chicago police interested in Robin, too."

"No, no." Her voice faltered. "We can't get the police in. Not yet. They'd never understand and it—it would make these people, whoever they are, desperate. They'd know we suspected something. I'm sure it would be worse."

The break in her voice and the way she half turned away from me brought all my basic suspicions of her rushing back. She must be a phony, a girl who prophesied wholesale murders and who wouldn't call in the police. On a sudden hunch, I said:

"Did you by any chance telephone me one night, not so long ago, to report an automobile accident?"

"Me? Telephone you?" she echoed. "How could I? I was in Chicago until last evening."

I added, watching her intently: "Then you didn't know that I've already been murdered once? I found my own corpse lying around in one of the local lanes."

It was hard to be certain in that dim light, but I could almost have sworn she had no idea what I was talking about. She said rather angrily:

"For heavens sake, stop trying to be funny. Don't you realize—?"

She broke off as the door was thrown open and Dawn descended upon us, whistling unattractively through her teeth.

"We've fixed the fuses," she announced cheerfully. "Look, one, two, three—bingo!"

As if in obedience to some invisible power, the room sprang into full illumination again. After the semi-obscurity to which I had become accustomed, it was almost blinding.

And in the stronger light Sydney Train's face looked different, less exotic somehow, far more like the face of a normal, very attractive young girl with a lot of strength of character and a great deal of common sense. Everything that had been born of the candlelight seemed just a foolish pipe-dream.

Dawn was staring at our visitor with rapt attention. "Daddy," she asked, "has she been telling you more about Robin and that terrible danger?"

Somewhere a clock struck. I seized upon it as an excuse to say: "Bed time, brat. Say goodnight to Miss Train and skiddoo."

With remarkable docility my daughter bobbed an amateur curtsey to Miss Train, permitted me to kiss her and withdrew. After she had gone, there was a long moment of silence.

SYDNEY TRAIN was staring at me thoughtfully.

"Dr. Westlake," she said at length, "I want to ask you something."

"What is it?"

Her eyes meeting mine were very steady. "You said you thought I'd come here to get something out of you. It wasn't exactly true. But now, after—after I've seen this horoscope and everything, there is something I want you to do for me."

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"I'm not committing myself."

"It's for Robin really. You know how I feel about him. I'm in love with him. I want to marry him." Her lips moved in a small, pleading smile. "I don't know any more than you what's going on. But I do know there is danger. And it's terrible for me to think of Robin there in Chicago in the very thick of it."

She took a quick step toward me. "You've got to get him out of Chicago. You're the only one who can do it. Write him tomorrow and invite him here. Say you'll need him when you settle the estate or whatever you do. He'd be safe here. Nothing could happen in Kenmore."

"Nothing at all, I'm sure," I said sardonically.

She ignored the irony in my voice. She seemed completely absorbed with her own anxiety. "Won't you do that, please? After all, Robin's your cousin, and you—"

"I thought I was supposed to be deflecting the danger from myself. If I bring Robin here, I'm walking straight into your astrological trap, aren't I?"

This nonplussed her a bit because she must have realized, that, from her point of view, I was talking very good sense.

"Perhaps," she said jerkily. "There's the chance of that. But there's another way to look at it, too. Both of you are in danger. If you stick together, you'll be stronger to face it."

"Ingenious," I said. "Very ingenious."

"But you will do it? You will promise to write him?"

"I'm not promising anything tonight," I said. "You've made a nervous wreck of me and I'm going to bed. By the way, I think the spare room is fixed up for you."

"Oh, no, please," she put in swiftly. "I'd sooner sleep right here on the couch by the fire. It's—it's that I didn't bring any things."

That sounded odd to me, but I let it go. I felt that Sydney Train and I had soared high enough into the empyrean together to make argument over so mundane a point seem petty. I brought sheets and things and laid them on the couch.

"Sure you'll be all right?"

"Absolutely. And please don't bother about the car. It can stay outside on the drive."

With swift, graceful movements she started making up her provisional bed.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you for everything."

I didn't quite know what there was to thank me for. But she glanced over her shoulder with a quick, radiant smile, as if she were far more satisfied with the results of the evening's conversation than I would have expected.

I noticed also that, when I picked up the Matthew Barker documents from the table, her eyes flicked instantly to them.

She was still watching them as I said goodnight and left the room.

BEFORE returning Cousin Matthew's papers and the horoscope to the safe, I took the opportunity to glance through the will a trifle more carefully in my office. I had hardly troubled to read it when the copy had first reached me shortly after the old man's death. Indeed, throughout the whole business I had been a neglectful and indifferent "executioner." Even with Sydney Train that evening I had gone through only the main clauses.

Now, as I turned over the last page, a codicil I had not noticed before caught my attention. It read:

> **And I do further charge Hugh Cavendish Westlake that, if my son, Robin Barker, shall be alive on his twenty-first birthday, there shall be given into his hands the horoscope cast for him by Maximus in the year of his birth. He shall be instructed to read and peruse it carefully inasmuch as therein lies not only his own personal destiny, but his chance of affecting the destiny of many people.**

It was rather eerie seeing that crazy horoscope referred to so solemnly in a legal document. Obviously the sage old Matthew Barker had attached as much importance to it as did Sydney Train.

And what did he mean about a chance

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of affecting the destiny of many people? By then my mind was open to any ideas, however outlandish. And I started to wonder whether there couldn't be, after all, some cryptic and vital clue hidden in that undecipherable German scrawl.

And whether it was, perhaps, that hidden thing rather than the hocus-pocus of murder prophecies that had really interested the unfathomable Miss Train.

I was still wondering that as I let my eyes drop to the final sentence of the codicil. It ran:

> **And it is my wish that, when Hugh Cavendish Westlake shall have discharged his duties as executor as heretofor set forth, he shall be paid from my estate the sum of two thousand dollars over and above the fees which are justly and legally his due as executor.**

Of all the evening's unnerving revelations, that perhaps was the only one which offered a touch either of gaiety or of humor. Out of the maelstrom of danger and impending doom which my connection with the Barkers seemed to have stirred up for me, at least there had emerged on the credit side of the ledger those two thousand very welcome dollars.

Maybe Dawn would get her new car, after all.

But when I had carefully locked the documents into the safe and retired to my bedroom, even the thought of a modest legacy could not do much to cheer me.

I thought pessimistically of what, according to Maxinus, lay ahead of me. Though all motives were still utterly vague I had learned enough that night to be almost sure that I had already narrowly escaped from one particularly unpleasant experience—virtually through a miracle.

Would there be more miracles to help me in the future? Or was Destiny, as represented by the unknown man with the birthmark and his friend in Chicago, actually preparing to eliminate my young cousin—and myself?

Those were not very nice thoughts.

CHAPTER IX

A STAR IS LOST

I WAS awakened next morning by a terrific thumping on my door. Then Dawn's shrill voice: "Daddy, it's gone—disappeared."

"What's gone, brat?" I asked sleepily.

"The car. Her lovely car she came in last night." My daughter from the other side of my bedroom door was apparently having a rush of words to the mouth. "I went out to have a look at it early because I wanted to see what kind it was so we could buy one like it, and it wasn't there. And it wasn't in the garage."

By this time I had gotten out of bed and was slipping on a bathrobe.

"Don't be garrulous," I admonished as I joined my daughter in the passage. "We'll go and see what's what together."

But Dawn had been right. Neither in the driveway, nor in the garage, was the high-powered car which had borne Sydney Train from Chicago. That wasn't all either.

As we passed through the kitchen on the way back from the garage, Dawn clutched my arm.

"Look, Daddy, they're gone, too."

"What now?" I asked.

"Those pretty pink things Rebecca hung up here to dry last night. Her underclothes must have been stolen."

It may sound absurd, but until now it had not even occurred to either of us to wonder whether Sydney Train herself had gone the way of her clothes and her car. Then the thought struck both of us simultaneously and, with Dawn at my heels, I plunged into the living room.

It was empty.

Rebecca's purple wrap lay neatly folded on the chair near the dead remnants of the fire. On the table lay an envelope with my name scribbled on it in pencil.

Hastily I slit open the envelope and took out the note inside. It read:

> ***Dear Dr. Westlake:***
> ***Remember what I said. Take every possible precaution. There is real danger. And I mean this more than I have***

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ever meant anything. Write Robin immediately at the Casaubon Hotel and get him to spend his twenty-first birthday here in Kenmore.

Sincerely,
Sydney Train

As I folded the note back into the envelope, Dawn asked doubtfully:

"What does it say?"

"It says thank you very much for a delightful evening," I said.

Dawn looked surprised. "Well, I'm damned," she said.

I didn't even reprove her for swearing. I felt pretty damned, myself. Sydney Train apparently was incapable of taking a night's sleep without injecting drama into it.

MY MIND was already made up as to my next move. My mornings, rain or shine, had to be given over to my large, straggling country practice. But a talk with Inspector Cobb must obviously be arranged in very short order. I called him right away and extracted his promise to drive out after lunch.

From our telephone conversation I had the impression that Cobb was amused when I told him about my star-crossed cousin Robin and of the mysterious appearance and disappearance of Miss Sydney Train. But after he had arrived and was established in the living room, I could tell he was alarmingly interested. It was obvious, too, that he was trying to fit this latest development into some pattern which had already formed in his mind.

"It's crazy and worse," he said when I had finished my story, "but it all makes some crazy sort of sense. At least it would make sense if only we knew what they were after."

"*They* being the man with the purple birthmark and his heavyweight friend in Chicago," I said not without uneasiness. "Then you really think this Robin Barker business is tied up with that mysterious automobile accident?"

"I think we'd be darn fools if we didn't think something of the sort. To me it's about the only explanation that makes any sort of sense at all."

Cobb sucked reflectively at his empty pipe, his eyes gray and solemn. "And this is the way we'd better figure for the time being. Some bunch of crooks wants something which belongs to this young Robin Barker. They've maybe worked on him and found out he can't get possession of—whatever it is—until he comes of age.

"Well, then—" Cobb paused and frowned a moment before going on.

"If that's so, you, as executor for the estate, obviously figure pretty large. That would explain what the Train girl said about their planning to *eliminate* you."

I thought he was being rather logical and cold-blooded about my fate, but I didn't interrupt.

"Okay," he said, continuing his pleasant saga. "Judging from that phony accident, it looks as if they wanted you alive rather than dead—at least for the time being. And they must have wanted you enough to have committed murder to be sure of getting you. Because, if I'm right, that guy in the car was deliberately murdered.

"Now, if Dawn hadn't snitched your gas you'd have gone on to the corner of Hill Road where the other car was parked catty cornered, remember? The woman would have come out, the way she did with Jo Briggs, and asked if you were Dr. Hugh Westlake. You'd have got into that car and"—he gestured with his hands—"pouff, you'd have been eliminated all right."

"I'm beginning to realize that."

"And you'd have been far more efficiently eliminated than if they'd actually killed you, because we should all have thought you'd been bumped off in that car accident on Mill Lane. And we'd have buried an unknown crook in Kenmore Cemetery underneath a fancy tombstone inscribed Hugh Cavendish Westlake."

"It's—it's macabre," I said, "and utterly fantastic."

"Sure it's fantastic." Cobb nodded soberly. "So crazy that I wouldn't dream of sending in an official report. They'd laugh me off the force."

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WITH an ostrich impulse not to face unpleasant facts, I argued: "But think of the high-power organization a plot like that would take. Neither Robin nor I could possibly have anything which would be worth that much trouble. And, as for kidnaping me as executor to sign away the estate—why, it's tied up in a trust fund which even the Archangel Gabriel couldn't break."

Cobb asked suddenly: "Who would benefit if Robin died before his twenty-first birthday?

"A few eminently respectable institutions for scientific research." I laughed rather hollowly. "Maybe the great professors of experimental chemistry have all banded together to gang up on Robin and me for the benefit of science."

But Cobb was not amused. "If it isn't money they're after," he mused, "it's knowledge, some knowledge that you or your cousin must possess. It looks as if it's tied up with the estate, too. Tell me about the boy's father, Matthew Barker."

I recounted all that I had told Sydney Train the night before about the eccentric Professor Barker. My father's first cousin had been a brilliant scientist with a weakness for astrology. He had worked a great deal abroad and had been given almost as many honorary degrees as there were first class universities in the world.

Cobb listened carefully, sucking at the unlit pipe. When I had finished, he said:

"I don't want to sound like a dime novel, but as a scientist, couldn't he have invented some secret formula that—?"

"That's what the Train girl asked. I told her he had invented a great many valuable formulas, some of which, I believe, revolutionized the aniline dye industry. Barkerlinus was named after him. But he was a high-minded old boy. Gave his discoveries to the world free, gratis and for the good of humanity. They couldn't be after any secret formula because he had no secrets."

"You say he worked abroad. Just supposing he had invented some—well, some poison gas or explosive. . ."

"But he wouldn't have. He was an ardent pacifist and the nearest he ever got to an explosive was the time he blew out his own left eye in his laboratory. He hated war and believed in universal goodwill, free trade and freedom from national barriers."

"IN THAT case," Cobb remarked with inescapable logic, "he would have wanted to keep secret any destructive discovery he might have made." He laid down his pipe and to my surprise his face was shining like that of a schoolboy who has worked out a tough problem in algebra. "Let's just imagine, Westlake, that he did stumble on some discovery that was not for the good of mankind. It might even have been that day when he lost his eye."

"I'll play," I said.

"Suppose," he continued excitedly, "some foreign nation knew or guessed about this discovery. That would give us a motive. With half Europe at each other's throat, it might be worth anything for an aggressive nation to get hold of a thing of that sort."

"It might," I agreed unwillingly. "But it's hard for me to believe in international intrigue in the quiet Vale of Kenmore. You're flying terribly high."

"It's the only sensible explanation for a plot as elaborate as this," said Cobb doggedly. "Remember the man they bumped off was a foreigner wanted for illegal entry by the authorities and wanted by his buddies for exposing a sort of spy ring. No one's going to take all that risk unless there's something really big at stake. And anything as under control as this usually means a powerful organization—often a foreign power—behind it."

"All right," I said. "But if this thing is so valuable and if they think I know about it, why don't they try to get hold of me again?"

"They probably will," said Cobb with a conviction which was not at all reassuring. "I agree with that gal. You better watch out." He added slowly: "By the

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way, Sydney Train wanted you to get your cousin down to Kenmore before his twenty-first birthday, didn't she?"

"She was mad keen about it."

"And I guess maybe she was right. At least maybe it's the best thing from our point of view." His eyes were reflective. "If we get both you and your cousin in this house, we can be sure of concentrating the whole thing here in Kenmore. Maybe, if we make them feel safe enough, they'll stick their necks out."

"Lovely!" I said bleakly. "And what about my poor motherless young daughter —not to mention her aging young father?"

Cobb's face went very serious. "Whatever happens, Westlake, I think you ought to send Dawn away."

"Send her away?" I echoed. "Even your lockup wouldn't keep Dawn away from here now she's got a hunch something's going on. Besides," I added gloomily, "if these foreign plotters of yours ever wanted to start any funny business with her, they'd be able to grab her just as easily if she was in Timbuctoo."

"I guess you're right at that. Well, I can only say I'll do my best to keep an eye on you both. Luckily you've got near neighbors now. An old doctor has taken Cedar Hollow down the road. His son was an aviator and got smashed up. They're nursing him there. At least there'll be someone almost within call—when things start to happen."

There was a certain grim satisfaction in the line of the inspector's mouth.

I SAID: "Cobb, I think you're enjoying this. It doesn't faze you an iota to make your oldest friend a decoy for a murdering hoard of international thugs." I grinned. "Okay. I'll be the guinea pig. I'll write Robin tonight. That'll make both you and Sydney Train happy." I added: "By the way, you never told me what you thought of Miss Train and her horoscope trapeze act."

I had expected him to pooh-pooh the astral element as a girlish whimsy, but instead he said: "You may laugh at those things, Westlake, but Mrs. Cobb sent up for a kind of star chart from a magazine last year. It told her she was due for a fourth within the year. She laughed about the way Sarah did when the angel brought the good news to Abraham." His blue eyes were twinkling. "But all I can say is I'll be needing your professional services again next month."

"Another reason for me to stick around," I said. "And how about Sydney Train herself. Any slant on her?"

He shrugged. "Maybe she's on the level; maybe she's the come-on girl for the gang. That's for us to find out later."

He paused, picking up his pipe again. "There's something else we ought to find out, something that might be the most important thing of all. If we are up against some formula and if it is tied in with old Barker's estate, we ought to be able to figure out just where it's kept."

It was only then that I remembered my melodramatic deduction of the night before. By that time I had no qualms about passing it on to Cobb. I told him about the codicil in the will concerning the horoscope.

"It just occurred to me," I concluded, "that maybe apart from all those prophecies of murder and sudden death the old man slipped in some clue to the secret, whatever it is."

Cobb pricked up his ears immediately. "My God, Westlake, why didn't you tell me this before? Where is the horoscope? I'd like to get a look at it right away."

"It won't help you much," I said. "It's in German."

"They can translate it for me in Grovestown," he persisted. "Come on."

I didn't know exactly what my powers as executor were with regard to the Barker papers. But, at that stage, I didn't particularly care. I took Cobb up to the office and started working the antiquated combination of the safe.

As I did so, my mind went back to that other time last night when I had been opening the safe and had had that vivid

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impression of someone standing behind me, watching me.

I turned the brass knobs and the door swung open. I put my hand in and brought out a sheaf of papers.

"Here's the copy of the will," I said, "and here's the insurance documents and—"

I broke off and started fumbling through the few remaining things in the safe. It's strange, but for a moment I felt a queer twinge of panic. I thought of Sydney Train as I had found her when I went back to the living room, sitting on the arm of my chair with her hair gleaming in the firelight and her breath coming a little too quickly.

It couldn't be true, I told myself. It was too fantastic that Sydney Train could have done a thing like that.

But it was true. A feverish search of the contents of the safe brought clinching evidence.

I turned to Cobb. I said weakly: "I'm sorry. But it's gone. It isn't here. The horoscope has been stolen."

CHAPTER X

MEMORY OF A BRIGHT STAR

FEELING rather limp, I passed on to Cobb my suspicions about Sydney Train. He listened without speaking; then he gave a small grunt.

"Well, I guess there's not much more doubt about that girl being a phony," he said. "And there's not much doubt about the horoscope either. Looks like it must be the thing they're after."

I said hopefully: "And now they've got it, maybe they'll leave us in peace."

"Maybe." Cobb looked thoughtful. "That depends on whether the Train girl's in with the rest of them or not. If she's playing a lone hand"—he shrugged—"then the others will still be out for your blood."

I shut and locked my very unburglar-proof safe. "I'll pin a notice on my front door, saying: *For All Secret Formulae, Please Apply to Miss Sydney Train of Chicago.*" I added as an afterthought: "By the way, if she really has stolen the horoscope, oughtn't we to make some effort to get it back? It's part of my job as executor to hand it over to Robin on his twenty-first birthday. If I can't produce it, maybe I'll be gypped out of that two-thousand-buck legacy."

Cobb nodded grave agreement. "We've got to get it back. I'm against anything like official action—yet. But I have a pal on the Chicago force. I guess he'd be able to locate Miss Train okay. A little persuasion or maybe a little quiet housebreaking might pull the trick for us."

"Fine," I said. "And if we do get the horoscope back, what then? I'm none too keen to give it house room."

"I'll take charge of it for a while," said the inspector. "Look's like it's too important to leave lying around." He gave a dry glance at my old strong box. "We've got a real safe at Headquarters that'll be just the thing."

Before Cobb had left, our plans were made. He was to cope with Sydney Train and the horoscope; all I had to do was to write my invitation to Robin Barker and arrange for the settlement of the estate with the bank. After that, presumably, I was just to sit back and wait for all hell to break loose around me.

As I left Cobb out of the front door, the spring sky had darkened with night. There were few clouds and the stars were exceptionally bright.

I stared up at them, wondering uneasily what Maxinus would have had to say about them. They looked very smug and sure of themselves.

I could almost hear them passing the word from constellation to constellation all along the Milky Way:

"If you want to see something good, keep your eye on Robin Barker and his nearest male relative. Boy, are they going to be bumped off!"

THAT night I wrote, as instructed, to my cousin, Robin Barker, extending a cordial invitation to spend his twenty-

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first birthday in Kenmore and thus expedite the settling of his father's estate. I said nothing about horoscopes, danger or sudden death.

I also wrote to the bank.

Within a very few days the replies arrived. The bank wrote enclosing various papers indicating exactly where I had to sign and where Robin would have to sign. They made the setttlement of that unsettling estate sound absurdly simple and commonplace.

Robin's letter was surprisingly friendly. He would love to come to Kenmore, he said. But would I object if his stepmother came, too? She had not been very well in Chicago and the change to country air would do her a great deal of good.

I had met the second Mrs. Matthew Barker only once when I had gone West to attend old Professor Barker's funeral. Greta was years younger than Robin's father and, as I remembered her, a very stunning, Scandinavian-looking blonde.

The prospect of seeing her again was exciting. In fact, the whole idea of having two house guests made me feel quite festive.

I almost contrived to forget the far from festive reason for their visit.

It was on the afternoon of the day the letters arrived that Hamish, Dawn's Scottish terrier, vanished. My daughter, returning from school with the intention of giving him a bath, became wildly agitated by his disappearance. I myself was a little worried, for Hamish, ever since he had come to us as a dour puppy, had devoted his entire existence to guarding the house. Even the cyclic enticements of the local canine belles had never yet been known to lure him from his post.

"He's been gone since right after lunch, Rebecca says," moaned Dawn. "I know he's stuck in a groundhog hole or drowned in the creek."

I was just assuring my daughter that, whatever had happened, Hamish, an intrepid swimmer, would never have come to a watery death, when the telephone rang.

An unfamiliar but very cultured voice asked: "Is that Dr. Westlake?"

I said it was.

The voice said: "This is Dr. Heller. I have rented the Wallace house, Cedar Hollow, along the creek from you."

I remembered how Cobb had told me of my new neighbors the day before. I said something polite.

He continued: "I'm sorry to bother you, but do you happen to own a small Scottish terrier?"

"Yes, indeed. Do you have him?"

"Why, yes. He came over to the house quite some time ago. I did not know to whom he belonged. I have tried to tell him to go home. But he pays no attention." Dr. Heller added almost reproachfully: "He just sits here on the porch."

"Our dog? A Scotty?" I must have sounded most incredulous.

"I'm sure of it," he replied.

The idea of the home-loving Hamish sitting stubbornly on a strange porch was beyond the realms of my belief. "It's amazing," I said. "He never ran away before. Just shoo him off. I'm sure he'll come home."

Dr. Heller hesitated. Then he said: "I don't know that it would be wise. You see, my son has two large dogs. They are inclined to be a trifle impatient with smaller breeds. If they were to see him . . ."

His voice trailed off vaguely.

"Then I'll come over and pick him up," I suggested.

"Yes, yes, indeed. I'm sure that would be best." Dr. Heller sounded almost excessively eager at the prospect of seeing me. "Can I expect you soon?"

"Right away," I said and rang off.

When I broke the glad news to Dawn, she stared from wondering eyes. "Hamish not wanting to come home! Why, it's—it's the weirdest thing I ever heard."

Although I had run up against several weirder things in the past few weeks, I agreed with her in essence.

The evening light was fading into dusk as I made off down my drive and headed along the short strip of road which divided my house from Cedar Hollow.

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CHAPTER XI

DOG STAR

I HAD barely taken a dozen steps before I saw the girl. She was standing by the side of the road under the overhanging branches of a tree. But, as soon as she heard me coming, she began walking very briskly toward me.

I had the odd impression that she did not want me to know she had been waiting there, that she was trying to make out she had just come around the curve in the road.

She moved toward me, gazing with apparent absorption at the vista of the Kenmore Hills bathed in the last rays of the sunset. When she was almost up to me, her eyes flicked to me and widened slightly as if she had only just seen me.

Which I knew wasn't so.

She paused in front of me and said: "Excuse me, but do you live in that house over there?"

She pointed at my house. I nodded doubtfully.

I'd never seen her around Kenmore before. She was attractive with thick chestnut hair pushed back behind her ears and a red, rather determined mouth. She wore a green suède jacket, a plaid skirt and heavy brown walking brogues.

I particularly noticed the brogues because they were brand new and, somehow, they didn't go with a very slim, city pair of legs.

She wasn't at all the type of girl one would expect to find out on a solitary country hike.

She said: "You don't happen to own a Scottie, do you?"

"Yes," I said, wondering.

"It's no business of mine, of course, and I probably shouldn't be saying this. But earlier this afternoon I was—er—walking by here and I saw a man coming out of the bushes back there with a Scottie under his arm. The dog was making an awful fuss trying to get away. The man looked rather—rather furtive." She smiled and made a vague gesture with her hand. "I thought perhaps he was stealing it."

Distinctly puzzled, I asked: "What did the man look like?"

"He was quite old. And he had white hair. Very white hair." Her voice faltered. "I—I just thought as I happened to run into you, I'd tell you."

"Thank you very much," I said.

She stared at one of her brogues and pushed with its toe at the rough surface of the road. "I want . . ." she began. Then she stopped, looked decidedly awkward and then walked smartly away from me, her chin tilted upward.

It had been a peculiar encounter. It was peculiar in itself that this unknown girl should have felt it incumbent upon her to tell one unknown man that another unknown man might have stolen his dog. It was peculiar that she should so obviously have been waiting around for me and yet have been so obviously eager to keep me from guessing that fact.

But most peculiar of all was the light that it cast upon my new neighbor, Dr. Heller.

What could be the psychology of a man who had called me up to complain that my dog had visited him and refused to leave when he himself had forcibly kidnapped Hamish from his favorite sentry post behind the rhododendron bushes?

The girl with the green suède jacket had disappeared now in the early dusk behind me. I hurried on to Cedar Hollow, reached its heavily pillared gateway and made up the long drive to the house.

LYING on the gravel outside the front door were two large, blasé looking Doberman pinschers. One of them was asleep. The other rolled an indifferent eye at me but did not trouble to move when I stepped over it to get to the door.

As I pressed the buzzer, I heard a furious scuffling inside the house. A rending sound made me turn to face one of the living-room windows.

I was just in time to see the small, stolid black form of a Scottish terrier hurtling through the screen like a circus

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dog navigating a hoop. Hamish landed with a thud on the drive not five paces from the Doberman pinschers, shook himself, gave me one perfunctory, injured sniff and plodded away in the direction of home.

The Doberman pinscher who had been awake, closed his eyes and started to snore.

Dr. Heller seemed rather to have exaggerated the savagery of his son's large dogs.

In fact, everything Dr. Heller had said over the phone seemed to have been singularly unauthentic.

I should have been mad at Hamish for destroying neighbors' property. But I wasn't. I was just highly suspicious of everything about Cedar Hollow's new tenants.

Not without uneasiness, I thought of the two mysterious gentlemen in the Chicago Hotel who had discussed the prospect of eliminating me. I hoped that Dr. Heller would neither be built like a wrestler nor would have a purple birthmark on his left cheek.

Most of my suspicions were allayed when I saw the elderly man who came to the door. He was obviously the man who, according to the girl in the green jacket, had abducted Hamish, for he had the whitest hair of any human being I had ever seen. But there was certainly nothing sinister about him. Any girl might have envied his smooth, unlined skin; and his twinkling china blue eyes suggested some benevolent old gentleman from Dickens.

He held out his hand. "So you're Dr. Westlake. Well, well, we neighbors should get acquainted. I'm a physician too, you know. No, no, don't think I'm here to steal your practice. Retired now. Just two ambitions left, to grow roses and read Gibbon all through again." He smiled. "I'm Dr. George Heller."

I told him of Hamish's escape and apologized for the damage done. Rather pointedly, I concluded, "He landed on the drive almost on top of your Doberman pinschers. They didn't seem to mind him at all. His one idea was to get home as quickly as possible."

He looked at me, the blue eyes crinkling shrewdly at the corners. "Well, well, I see you have not been taken in by my little ruse. I'm afraid I am not a past master of deception. As you've probably guessed, Dr. Westlake, your dog did not come over here of his own accord. In fact, I captured him myself. And quite a job it was I assure you."

The smile left his face. "I chose this rather unorthodox method of making your acquaintance because there is something I am eager to tell you and I felt it might not be wise to mention the subject over the telephone."

Still on my guard, I said: "What's the trouble?"

The old man led me into the hall and shut the door carefully behind me.

"I AM taking a great liberty, Dr. Westlake." He gestured charmingly with his hands. "And probably you'll think of me as an old busy-body who should keep to his own affairs. But I feel it my duty as a neighbor to let you know."

Which was, apparently, just the way the girl in the green jacket had felt about Dr. Heller's dog theft.

"It sounds rather melodramatic. But—" Dr. Heller's benign lips moved in an embarrassed smile. "Dr. Westlake, you wouldn't have any enemies in the neighborhood, would you?"

"Enemies!" That question was becoming unnervingly familiar. "Not—not that I know of. No more than any country doctor who tries not to kill too many patients."

His eyes, very bright and Pickwickian, were fixed on my face. "There is no one who would wish to spy on all your movements, night and day?"

"I can't think of anyone," I said unconvincingly.

"You will soon know why I am asking you." Dr. Heller took my arm and led me through the hall and a long living-room into the growing dusk of the garden at the back. "I want to show you something rather extraordinary," he said.

He guided me, without speaking, down

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a rough path which led to the edge of the Kenmore creek and stopped by a small natural arbor of willows and bushes.

"I have not been long in the neighborhood, Dr. Westlake, and in a strange place one is naturally worried by anything unusual. I do not like to be curious but—well, you shall see for yourself."

He waved his hand. "I am starting a rose garden here and as I work behind these bushes I can see around the bend in the creek without being seen myself from the creek. I want to show you something that I have observed every day for the past three days."

Curious, I bent forward and peered through the bushes at the point he indicated. Although there was little light left I could distinctly make out the silhouette of a man holding what looked like a fishing pole.

However, he seemed completely indifferent to his fishing; all his attention was riveted on my house, a couple of hundred yards down the creek.

He was abnormally concentrated.

"He has been there from before breakfast until nightfall every day—fishing," said Dr. Heller quietly. "He never moves and he is always looking in the direction of your house."

He turned to me, his pink, unlined face curiously quizzical in the fading light.

"I was wondering, Dr. Westlake, whether the fishing in that particular spot is exceptionally good."

"So far as I know, no one's caught even a sunfish in the Kenmore Creek," I said, still staring with growing discomfort at the tall silhouette of the solitary angler.

"That's what I would have thought." Dr. George Heller nodded soberly. "That's why I felt I should bring the matter to your attention."

CHAPTER XII

THE ANGLER'S STAR

DR. HELLER and I looked at each other. It seemed to me that, behind their friendly smile, his eyes showed a more than neighborly interest in my reaction to the mysterious angler. I felt too that he expected some explanation.

But what could I tell him? Even if I decided to take him into my confidence, there was nothing I knew, nothing more tangible than the fact that certain people seemed to want a certain horoscope and would probably murder me if they felt it would help them to get it.

You could hardly say that to an elderly gentleman with white hair, whose major ambition was to make a rose garden on the banks of the Kenmore Creek.

Although the solitary fisherman had aroused my most pessimistic suspicions, I tried to turn the whole matter off lightly. Dr. Heller accepted my frivolity with a grave politeness which betrayed a certain skepticism.

"In any case," he said, "now you are here, I hope you will give me the pleasure of taking something to drink with me."

I accepted. As we moved across the dark lawn to the house, I remembered that Cobb had told me Dr. Heller had a son with him who had been badly smashed in an airplane accident. I inquired after him and the old man showed immediate and rather pathetic eagerness to talk about him.

Brian Heller, it seemed, had owned a plane of his own which he had flown as a hobby. He had been flying solo when he crashed and had only just dragged himself out of the blazing wreckage in time to save his life. A hip-bone had been broken and was still in a plaster cast. His jaw had been fractured too.

But the worst damage had been to his eyes. For a while they had thought he would lose his sight; but it was improving now, although his eyes were still weak and he suffered from terrible insomnia.

"He was in the hospital for several months," concluded Dr. Heller, shaking his head sadly. "But after a time being shut up there by himself beagn to tell on his nerves. That's why I brought him here. In a way, it's a great responsibility. And he will have to return to the hospital,

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of course, when it's time for the cast to be removed.

"But at least he has my companionship and country air and there is a very efficient trained nurse. Being a medical man myself, I can take as good care of him as anyone else."

He paused and added almost timidly: "Perhaps you would be kind enough just to say a few words to him. We have not met any of our neighbors yet and I think it is rather lonely for him having only the nurse and an old man like myself to talk to."

I said, of course, that I would be delighted. Dr. Heller made us a highball each in the living-room and then led me through a far door into a long library. The curtains had been drawn and the soft reading lamps lit. Close to the wood fire, lay a man on a wheel stretcher. A middle-aged nurse in uniform sat by him, but she slipped away as soon as she saw us.

DR. HELLER took me across the room and introduced me to his son. Brian Heller wore a green shade over his eyes and his jaw was tightly bandaged. All his body from the hips down was encased in a heavy plaster cast which made any sort of movement impossible. It must have been excruciatingly uncomfortable, but the boy seemed very courageous about it.

He shook hands with me and chatted with us cheerfully as if there was nothing the matter.

"The only thing I have against being cracked up," he said with a friendly grin at Dr. Heller, "is that it gives Dad an unfair advantage. I can't keep him from reading out loud to me his beloved *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*"

When we had almost finished our drinks, he said: "Dad, since we've got Dr. Westlake here, why don't we pick his brains? Couldn't we ask him what he thinks of Doc Smith's idea of making a Sleeping Beauty out of me?"

Dr. Heller passed a tentative hand across his snow white hair. "I hesitate to ask Dr. Westlake for his medical advice on an informal visit like this. But I would be very grateful to have a second opinion."

He went on to explain that the constriction of the cast and the constant pain from his eyes had kept Brian sleeping very badly for a long time. The doctor who had taken charge of his case at the hospital had advised the liberal use of hypnotics. He suggested that, if Brian were kept asleep for extended periods by the use of barbiturates, the added rest might not only relieve his pain but also facilitate the process of healing.

"Does that seem reasonable to you?" asked Dr. Heller anxiously. "I'm afraid I am not very up in modern therapeutics. Somehow I dislike the idea of my son's being comatose or semi-comatose practically all the time."

"If his phyisican recommends it, I'd say it was perfectly all right," I said. "I know it's being done. Hypnotics are depressing to the system, of course."

"But not as depressing as lying here like a log," put in Brian. "Just so long as it won't kill me, I'm for it. And if the pills don't send me to sleep, there's always the *Decline and Fall.*"

As he spoke, the door from the living-room was pushed open and the two Doberman pinschers peered shamefacedly around its edge. At a low whistle from Brian they bounded across the room and, completely ignoring Dr. Heller and me, made straight for the stretcher bed.

In solemn ritual, they each in turn put their front paws up on the edge and licked Brian's hand.

He patted them affectionately. "Best dogs I ever had," he said. "Swell hunters too, trail anything from a skunk to a human being; have the most amazing noses of any animals I know." He pulled the female's ear. "Haven't you, Lady?"

The two dogs flopped down on the floor, put their snouts on their front paws and beat a rhythmic tattoo with their tails.

We left Brian with his dogs.

In the living-room I made my adieus to Dr. Heller. The old man's blue eyes showed worry.

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"You're sure you're all right, Dr. Westlake? You don't think that man is planning to do you some—er—disservice?"

"If he is, I can take care of him okay," I said with rather manufactured bravado. "Thanks for drawing my attention to him anyway. I'll drop home by way of the creek and take a look at him."

AS I stepped into the Hellers' garden and moved across the lawn and through the shrubbery to the little path which skirted the creek, the Easter moon had risen. It hung round and lemon above the stream, sharpening the tall, thin silhouette of the man who still stood motionless at the bend, the fishing pole in his hand etched dark against the soft shadows of the willows.

"Any luck?" I asked, emerging suddenly from the dusk into the moonlight.

The young man started at the sound of my voice, but his reply was studiedly casual.

"Can't complain. After all, it's what I came for. Pretty, isn't it?" He pointed the tip of his fishing pole at the pale constellations which now sprinkled the vast arena of the sky in modest rivalry to the moon. "Swell place for star-gazing."

Perhaps, ever since my encounter with Sydney Train and the horoscope, I had become super-sensitive to stars as a conversational subject. But it struck me that there was some definite undercurrent of significance to that remark. The words, spoken quietly, almost listlessly, had been just a little too underlined.

I could see his face quite plainly in the moonlight. It was lean with very pronounced cheekbones and dark smudgy eyebrows.

An almost instinctive checkup convinced me that he could hardly be said to have a wrestler's build; certainly there was no birthmark on his cheek.

But he was a stranger—just as the girl in the green suède jacket had been.

And strangers were very rare around Kenmore.

I told him none too politely that he was star-gazing on my property and suggested there was better fishing to be had elsewhere.

"I'm sure of it," he said, "but if I moved I might catch something. After all, I'm on a vacation and no one wants to catch fish on a vacation."

The insouciance of his manner, half pleasant, half insolent, had me stopped.

"But I'll tell you what I'll do," he went on. "Since you say I'm trespassing, I'll bring along any fish I do catch to your house."

"All you'll catch," I said boorishly, "is pneumonia."

In the moonlight I could tell he was smiling crookedly. "Well, if I do, I'll bring it to you to treat," he said. "And either I'll live or I'll die. It's all in the stars, isn't it, Dr. Westlake?"

There was no mistaking the ironic emphasis on the word that time.

"But if I were you," he added lightly, "I wouldn't pay too much attention to the stars. Sometimes they get badly balled up."

For a second I felt an almost uncontrollable exasperation with all these fantastic people who stole my dogs and loitered about the front and rear entrances to my house.

I almost ordered this enigmatic young man off my property. Then I decided it was probably wiser to let things rest for the time being at least.

With an irritated "Goodnight", I left.

But I could not get the day's new acquaintances out of my mind. An unknown girl in a green leather jacket and too new brogues, who had warned me against an elderly gentleman with Dickensian charm who had warned me against an unknown man with a fishing pole who had warned me against the stars—could they all somehow be tied up together? And, again, could they be tied up with my extraordinary cousin, Robin Barker who had not even arrived yet in the neighborhood?

It all seemed impossibly lunatic. But how else could I explain their unnecessary interest in my affairs?

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I glanced back over my shoulder. I could still see the gaunt silhouette of the solitary fisherman looming over the stream like a gigantic heron.

CHAPTER XIII

MIDNIGHT MEETING WITH THE STARS

I ARRIVED home to find Dawn and Hamish, both entirely covered in soapsuds, paddling around in the bathtub. I presumed that it was my daughter who was giving the bath and Hamish who was taking it. But it could easily have been the other way around.

Hamish looked very smoldering and Scotch but none the worse for his enforced sojourn at the Heller house. Dawn, in high good spirits at having her pet restored to her, whistled through her teeth.

It was a very domestic picture. It should have cheered me and restored the illusion that all was right with the world.

But it didn't. In some obscure way the sight of that small girl with her small Scottie only heightened the reality of the intangible danger which seemed to be lurking all around us outside the house. It was like a scene deliberately put into a story to sharpen by contrast the sinister implications of the main plot.

It was almost dinner time. I left her and moved to the living-room where I mixed myself a highball and sat down in front of the fire.

The time had come to do some heavy thinking.

It would not be true to say that the steady buildup of the past weeks had made me frightened. At least, not physically so. I was a little afraid for Dawn in the blundering way that a father must always be afraid for his child when the security of the home is threatened, however vaguely. I suppose I was a little uneasy for my own skin, too.

But my major sensation went far deeper than that. It was partly profound indignation, partly superstitious awe of something which, at every turn, outraged common sense.

I reviewed, as coldbloodedly as I could, the actual incidents which had occurred since that first night when the unknown female voice over the phone had called me out into the darkness and I had stumbled so melodramatically upon that weird imitation of my own corpse.

In sober conference, both Cobb and I had decided that I had by the merest hairsbreadth, avoided an intricate if meaningless kidnap or murder plot.

Later the astounding Miss Sydney Train had appeared from nowhere with a story that brought sudden sense to the jabberwocky of what had happened before and, with its zodiacal claptrap, prophesied far worse danger in the future for the elusive Robin Barker and "his nearest male relative."

Those two things had been, as it were, the smash opening of the first act and the argument of what was liable to occur in the rest of the drama. From then on, incidents, arriving haphazard, seemed nothing more than disjointed episodes which, if they were all bound together, might eventually make some terrifying sort of sense. Perhaps the next climax would clarify them.

As I twisted my highball glass in my hand, I started wondering exactly what the next climax would be. Probably, I reflected, it would come with the arrival at my house of Robin Barker.

And why not?

After all, important as I appeared to be, it was my young cousin who must always play the part of the juvenile lead.

The stars, according to Maxinus, spelled out murder. I thought of Sydney Train's face, white, oddly elusive in the candlelight as she had said:

"You've got to be careful, terribly careful. Never be off your guard for an instant until the period of danger is past."

Hysterical nonsense, perhaps. But was I being careful enough? Should I have forced that solitary fisherman to leave my property? Should I have tried to extract more frankness from the benign, dog-stealing Dr. Heller? Should I have asked

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that girl in the green leather jacket exactly what her interest in me was?

THE answer was pathetically obvious. In spite of my own conviction that something really vast and menacing lurked in the shadows, not a single thing had happened which justified taking any sort of official action. As Cobb had said, if he tried to interest the authorities, he would be laughed off the force.

At the moment I had to play a lone hand—myself, that was, and Inspector Cobb.

The thought of Cobb was reassuring. On an impulse I went to the telephone and rang his home.

Soon his voice over the wire was asking: "Well, Westlake, have things started to move yet?"

It steadied me to know that at least there was one human being who could be depended upon to take what I had to say seriously.

"Yes," I said. "The Campbells are coming, hooray, hooray. Some of them are creeping around the house already."

I skipped nothing as I told him exactly what had happened that afternoon from the disappearance of Hamish, through the episode with the auburn-haired lady and the Hellers, to the solitary angler.

Cobb listened without comment. At length he said: "Maybe it all means something, Westlake, and maybe it's just you're imagining things."

"Could anyone imagine all that in one afternoon?"

"You can imagine a hell of a lot when you've a mind to." The Inspector's voice was sober. "By the way, the red-headed gal is probably Mrs. Ralston, wife of the guy who's just rented the Talbot house out on the Ploversville Road."

"Another house rented?" I asked incredulously. Kenmore, except to its long-standing residents, had few of the meretricious attractions to lure transient trade.

"Yeah. You know my brother in the real-estate line. He told me this morning. This fellow Ralston called long distance and rented the house unseen. Didn't even ask the price."

"Where does he come from?" I asked apprehensively.

Cobb took a few seconds to reply. "Chicago," he said unwillingly.

It couldn't have been worse.

COBB read my thoughts. "I kind of got to wondering too when I heard they were from Chicago, Westlake. But my brother's seen the chap and says he's plumpish and baldish and harmless looking." He chuckled. "No purple birthmark on the left cheek." His voice became serious again. "While we're on the subject of Chicago and the Train girl, I got a report from my pal on the force out there. Either you imagined that young lady or she dropped plumb out of the stars and went back there. There's no such person as Sydney Train in Chicago."

"But she said she was the daughter of Robin's boss," I protested weakly.

"I know all about Robin's boss," said Cobb. "Nathan Scruggs, president of Scruggs and Dodge. Scruggs has a daughter but her name's Annabel and she isn't even in Chicago. Acts or something. Dodge has four daughters but they're all fat and married."

"Well, I'll be shot for a tinker."

"Hold it. There's more to come. Most of the dope she gave on Robin seems to be more or less true. He did work for Scruggs and Dodge and he did quit after some sort of a row. But when my pal went around to his hotel just to have a little informal chat with him, he found he'd left Chicago yesterday. Motoring east with his stepmother." He paused. "Barring accidents, Westlake, they should be with you sometime tomorrow."

Somehow, in my current state of tension, the prospect of Robin and his stepmother descending on me tomorrow sent me into a mild panic. "But what shall I do with them? What are we going to do about the horoscope?"

"We better keep our mouths shut about that horoscope for the moment and keep

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our eyes peeled for signs of Miss Sydney Train."

"And about these other things—the man out there pretending to fish in the creek, for example. Shouldn't I get rid of him somehow, make him go away before Robin arrives?"

"I wouldn't bother." Cobb gave a soft laugh. "Anyone who's dopey enough to go fishing in Kenmore Creek is probably a harmless nut."

"But—"

"Easy, easy." The Inspector's voice was irritatingly soothing. "I know it's hard on the nerves. But nothing's really happened yet, nothing you can do anything about. Let your cousin and his stepmother arrive, don't get too chatty with them—and wait."

"For what?"

"That," said Cobb, "is where you have me stopped. When's your cousin's twenty-first birthday, by the way? Three days from now, isn't it? Well, happy birthday to you."

I was about to ring off in exasperation when his voice came through again.

"Incidentally, how about me dropping around tomorrow evening to pay a social call on your house-guests? Not as a policeman, understand. Just as a personal friend and an expectant father."

I felt relieved. "That'll be fine."

"Okay. Then you'll be seeing me. Pleasant dreams."

IN SPITE of Cobb's good wishes, my dreams that night were far from pleasant. It seemed to me that I was in the Grovestown Planetarium, a place I hadn't entered for years. I was sitting alone in the dark auditorium and, above me, the large dome was bright with stars.

At first there seemed nothing else but those winking constellations, silence and a vast cosmic emptiness. Then from somewhere a voice started speaking. It was presumably the voice of an invisible lecturer, but I knew, the way you do in dreams that it was the voice of old Professor Barker.

A long, thin wand, vaguely reminiscent of a fishing pole, waved up, pointing first to one star then to another.

"If only you look," said the voice, "you can always see them up there—as they really are. The twelve great Signs of the Zodiac which rule our destiny."

The wand swerved to the left, indicating a group of stars.

"Virgo," said the voice. "The Virgin."

And, as the wand pointed, the stars subtly changed, looming forward, gradually slipping together, taking shape as the slim figure of a girl.

At first she was shadowy; then I made out the soft purple folds of a robe and above them, the pale face, the dark hair, the dark shining eyes of Sydney Train.

The wand moved onward and the vision dissolved back into the heavens.

"Libra," said the voice. "The Balance."

Once again there was that ritualistic minuet of stars and a huge pair of gleaming scales appeared in the sky. Behind them, holding them up, was a second female form—the form of a girl with red hair, a green suède jacket and heavy tan brogues . . . Mrs. Ralston.

From then on chaos reigned in the sky. The moving wand, crazily accelerated, shot from one cluster of stars to another.

"Gemini. The Twins."

There was a glimpse of two naked boys; then suddenly their ears extended upward, their faces lengthened and they were two Doberman pinschers galloping across the heavens.

"Aquarius. The Water Carrier."

An old man stumbling forward, his shoulders stooping under a heavy yoke from which hung great water buckets—an old man with very white hair and very pink cheeks . . . Dr. Heller.

"Pisces. The Fish," said the voice.

A vast, heraldic fish was leaping and bounding in the firmament. A silver line extended from its mouth. And far up at the pole of the heavens, his fishing rod bent double, was the lean young fisherman from the banks of the Kenmore Creek.

For a moment that titanic battle domi-

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nated the heavens. Then once again the voice sounded.

"See what happens when Pisces moves into the orbit of the Dipper or the Wain. See what will happen any day now."

The fish and the fisherman were blotted out. The vague shape of a wagon loomed out of the sky; it came nearer and nearer with a steady, relentless progress.

Suddenly I realized it was a wagon no longer. It was a wheel-stretcher like the stretcher on which Brian Heller had lain that afternoon.

And someone was pushing it. It was a man. That's all I could see at first. It came nearer. I made out the man's face. It was white and hard as stone.

And scrawled across the left cheek was a long purple birthmark.

Excruciating dream-terror seized me then. There was a shrouded figure lying on the stretcher, his face covered by a napkin. Something, against my own will, urged me forward. My fingers moved to the napkin and tugged it away.

I saw the face of that recumbent figure.

The sight was horrible in itself—but far more horrible in the memories it evoked. It was blank and hideously mutilated, like the face of that man I had seen sprawled in the wreckage of the car on Mill Lane.

But it was not the face of a stranger.

For all its grisly distortion, I recognized it as my own face.

The figure lying there under the sheet was myself.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MYSTERY STAR GLOWS

AFTER that macabre dream, it was a relief to wake up at last to the wholesome sanity of a spring morning; to see my own normal, if unshaven, face in the glass; and later to find Dawn at the breakfast table, cheerful and chatty in a clean school frock.

"I went for a walk with Hamish before breakfast," she announced proudly. "And we met an awfully nice man fishing in the creek. His name's Dan Leaf." She swallowed cereal and added as an afterthought: "He can wiggle his ears."

I felt a stab of alarm at the thought of my daughter innocently prattling with the sinister angler.

I said sternly: "You better not have anything to do with that man, brat."

"Why ever not?" My daughter stared at me in surprise. "Isn't he respectable?"

"It's—" I was at a loss for an adequately juvenile explanation. "It's just that—well, it's not polite to talk to strange people."

That left my daughter unmoved.

"It's not polite to wiggle your ears, is it?" she asked vaguely. "But I enjoy seeing it done."

As usual Dawn had contrived to make me feel like a neurotic, over-suspicious dodo. How could there possibly be anything dangerous in a relationship between my daughter and a man who wiggled his ears?

Before leaving for school, Dawn disappeared into the living-room with a look, part of mystery, part of guilt on her face. I pretended not to notice, but strolled in on her after she had been alone there for a few minutes.

I was just in time to see her spreading over my desk sheaves of automobile catalogues which, as I thought, I had banished into the scrapbasket weeks ago.

"What are you doing, brat?" I asked.

"Spreading automobile catalogues on your desk," replied my daughter with disarming accuracy.

"And why are you doing that?"

"Oh, I don't know. I feel like it." As I moved closer, she opened one of the catalogues with a studied casualness which gave away the fact that she knew exactly what page she wanted to expose. She pointed to an alluring colored photograph of a dove-gray sedan. "That's not bad, is it?" she asked.

I said: "I thought I told you there was to be no more sales talk about that new car?"

"Sales talk?" echoed Dawn. "Why, I was only pointing it out. I felt—"

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"And I feel," I cut in grimly, "that the sooner you get off to school the—"

Dawn did not wait for the end of the sentence. She scuttled out of the room.

But the damage was done. Whether she had sensed it or not, Dawn had attacked me at exactly the psychological moment.

After she had gone, I stared at that picture of the dove-gray sedan. It was beautiful, very beautiful. It had the lines and the allure of a Hedy Lamar.

Robin and his stepmother would arrive sometime that evening. With their arrival, all hell would probably break loose. In a week I would either be dead or the recipient of a two-thousand-dollar legacy. I might as well do something rash for once.

That's the way I felt. Besides, it was springtime and everything should have been gay and it wasn't.

In short, the sap was rising—to the bait.

Before making my rounds at the Grovestown Hospital that morning I had ordered the dove-gray sedan.

IT WAS to be delivered in two days time as a surprise for Dawn on Robin Barker's twenty-first birthday. I was determined that at least one pleasant thing should happen on that fateful day.

At lunchtime I made arrangements to cope with the still indeterminate arrival of the Barkers and assured myself that all the papers on the settling of the estate were in order. There was nothing I could do about the missing horoscope. But, even if I failed on the astral plane, I could at least adequately fulfil my terrestrial role of "executioner."

My uncertainty about the hour of the Barkers' arrival was put at an end by a telegram which came just as I was leaving the house on an emergency call. The wire was signed by Robin. It announced that they hoped to be with me in time for dinner.

Throughout the afternoon as I visited patients in the more remote section of my practice, the Barkers remained uppermost in my mind. I tried to picture the way they looked. Robin, I was almost sure, I would not be able to recognize. When I had seen him, he had been a mere boy; now he would be a young man.

The memory of Greta, however, was still vivid. I remembered smooth blond hair, a perfect skin and blue eyes which, beneath slightly tilted brows, had a depth and a direct way of looking at you and a certain secret, ironic humor of their own.

Yes, I could not fail to recognize Greta Barker.

And yet all the elusive influences which seemed to be at play around both Robin and his stepmother had made them oddly unreal, almost like elemental forces who would bring with them to my house certain disturbance—and almost certain danger.

I was thinking despondently of what might lie ahead, later that evening, as I urged the old black sedan on its homeward journey. My speculations must have made me absent-minded, for, as I approached the pillared entrance to Dr. Heller's house, I did not notice the car coming out of the drive until I was almost up to it.

Neither of us was moving fast enough for there to be danger of an accident. But I put on my brakes and stopped. So did the other car.

I leaned out of the window and called: "Sorry."

Vaguely curious as to what sort of people called on Dr. Heller, I peered at the young man at the wheel. A woman was sitting beside him. As I called out, she moved and I could see her face through the window. I saw smooth blond hair under a frivolous little black hat. I also saw a pair of blue, aware eyes.

They were staring at me curiously; then they crinkled at the corners in a smile of recognition.

The woman waved and said: "It is Dr. Westlake, isn't it? Hello, there, Cousin Hugh."

I climbed out of my car. Greta Barker stepped out of the other automobile and came toward me.

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SHE held out a small hand in a neat black glove. When she spoke there was the faintest trace of a foreign accent. "Robin and I have just been breaking in on your neighbors. We got the wrong house by mistake. But a perfectly sweet old man with white hair directed us how to get to you. How are you?"

Greta Barker was even more attractive than my memory of her. Slimmer, I thought, and very smart in a tailored black suit.

"I do hope you don't mind the shameless way I got Robin to have you invite me too. But the idea of the country sounded so attractive and Chicago was so dismal." She laughed infectiously. "Here I am monopolizing you and you haven't even said hello to Robin. Come over and meet him."

The young man had got out of the car too by now and was standing at its side. He was wearing gray tweeds and a brown "pork pie" hat.

Greta drew me over to him and said: "Robin, this is your Cousin Hugh. You probably don't recognize each other."

"On the contrary, I recognize Cousin Hugh very well."

Robin Barker took my outstretched hand and gave it a vigorous squeeze.

As I made some hospitable remark, I looked at him carefully, trying to hide some of the apprehensive curiosity I felt.

So this rather pugnacious young man with the fair hair and the broad shoulders was my cousin, Robin Barker. I could see how the adolescent of my memory could have filled out into this large, athletic young man. But his face struck no chord and certainly he was not the vague, unphysical type one normally associates with chemical genius.

Robin Barker, who looked older than his almost twenty-one years, also looked as if he were very capable of taking care of himself.

Which was a relief.

Greta Barker insisted on driving the short distance home with me in my car while Robin followed in the other machine. My second cousin by marriage was full of the praises of Dr. Heller.

"He couldn't have been sweeter to us," she said. "And we met his son too. Poor boy, what a ghastly thing to be crippled like that." The blue eyes with their clear, untroubled humor, turned to meet mine. "You seem to have very pleasant neighbors."

As we swung up my drive with Robin following behind, I brooded over the unconscious irony of that remark.

Dawn was waiting for us in the hall, looking swept and garnished with a new frock and a very shiny nose. Normally my daughter is apt to be churlish with strangers, but her greeting of the Barkers was almost too enthusiastic. She kissed both Robin and Greta and staggered upstairs after them with a bag that was far too heavy for her.

AND later, when the Barkers had unpacked and straightened themselves out, she still showed a determination to monopolize them. Having dragged them around the garden, she expressed a fervent desire to take them to the Quarry Pool, a reputedly bottomless pond which was one of the local curiosities and lay in the woods about a quarter of a mile further down the valley.

I told her the Barkers were too tired to do any hiking that evening. But Greta, with an easy, good-natured smile, claimed that both she and Robin would love to see the Quarry Pool.

Consequently, the three of them set out.

They had been gone about half an hour when the phone rang. As always since that first night, I felt a certain apprehension as I went to answer it.

My apprehension increased when the operator told me that it was a long distance call from Cleveland, Ohio.

I knew no one in Cleveland, Ohio.

There were various drummings and cracklings. At length a female voice came through, distant and queerly disembodied.

"Is that Dr. Westlake?"

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"Yes."

"This is Sydney Train."

For a moment I was completely off my guard. I had never expected to hear from Sydney Train again.

But I pulled myself together sufficiently to ask: "Listen, you took that horoscope. You've got to bring it back. I've got to have it right away."

"Horoscope?" The tiny voice seemed even more remote. "Oh, yes. Do you want it? I'll— But that's not what I'm calling for. You've got to tell me. Has Robin arrived?"

"Yes."

"Let me speak to him, will you, please? I must."

"I'm sorry. He's out—out walking with my daughter."

"He's out? But he has arrived? He is all right?"

"Sure. He's all right."

Four hundred miles away in Cleveland I could hear Sydney Train catch her breath. "I'm glad. I've been so desperately anxious. Tell him I called. Tell him I'm thinking of him all the time."

"Okay," I said. "But what about that horoscope? I've got to have it. It's vital."

"Oh, yes. I'll see that you get it, I suppose," she said vaguely. Then that far away voice faded so that it was scarcely louder than the drone of a mosquito. "But you'll take care of Robin, won't you? It's reaching its zenith now, the period of danger. You've got to take care of him and see nothing happens in—"

I heard no more except for an infinitesimal click.

I stood there in the hall, thoroughly dazed, cursing myself for not having tried to find out just where in Cleveland she had been calling from. I still had not moved a few seconds later when the front door opened to admit Dawn, Greta and Robin Barker.

With tactless abruptness I said: "Oh, Robin, you've just missed a telephone call from Cleveland."

"From Cleveland?" The young man moved to my side, his square jaw thrust perplexedly forward. "Who on earth was calling?"

"Sydney Train," I said.

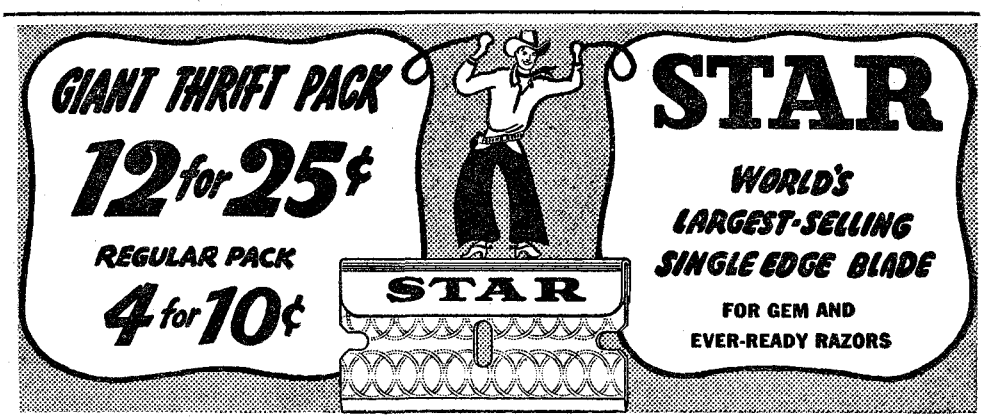
"Sydney Train?" His blue eyes were blank. "Who is Sydney Train?"

He glanced uncertainly at Greta Barker as if she might be able to offer some explanation. Dawn, open-mouthed, was giving him a long, puzzled stare.

"But of course you know who Sydney Train is," said my daughter wonderingly. "She's the girl you're engaged to. The girl you're going to marry."

"But I'm *not* engaged to be married. Certainly I'm not engaged to any girl of that name." Robin threw out his hands in a kind of exasperated confusion. "In fact, I have never in my life heard of anyone called Sydney Train."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



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MEN of - - - -
They Float Through The Air
IT HAS BEEN A THRILLING SUMMER FOR THE DAUNTLESS CLOUD-HOPPERS WHO RIDE THE UPPER AIR ON SILENT WINGS. IN JUNE, 27-YEAR-OLD TED BALLAK WAS TOWED UP 16,500 FEET IN HIS SAILPLANE "DOVE OF PEACE" AT STURGEON BAY, WIS., AND CUT LOOSE TO SOAR 54 MILES ACROSS LAKE MICHIGAN AND A WORLD'S RECORD FOR MOTORLESS FLIGHT OVER WATER. THE TEMPERATURE WENT AS LOW AS 16 BELOW ZERO. "WE'LL BE MAKING IT ACROSS THE ATLANTIC IN 20 YEARS," HE SAYS.
ve of Peace
Ted Ballak
AT ELMIRA, N.Y. UNO FISCHER PULLED THE FIRST BAIL-OUT IN THE 10-YEAR HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL SOARING CONTESTS. CAUGHT IN THE RUSHING THERMALS OF A DENSE CUMULO-NIMBUS CLOUD, HE WAS SUCKED UPWARD AT 40 FEET A SECOND AND FEARING DISASTER, STEPPED OVER THE SIDE. HE DROPPED 1,000 FEET BLIND BEFORE PULLING HIS RIP CORD, LEST HE AND HIS CHUTE BE CAUGHT IN THE TREACHEROUS UPDRAFT.

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DARING
by STOOKS ALLEN
DICK RANDOLPH, AKRON PILOT, CRASHED WITH HIS SHIP INTO A CROWD NEAR PARIS. SIX PEOPLE WERE INJURED BUT HE WAS ONLY SHAKEN UP. HE DIED OF A HEART ATTACK A MONTH LATER WHILE WORKING ON A NEW SHIP.
LIEUTENANT ROBERT M. STANLEY, BLIND FLYING INSTRUCTOR, SOARED TO A NEW ALTITUDE RECORD OF 17,264 FEET WHERE HIS INSTRUMENTS FROZE; AND WAS FORCED TO BAIL OUT WHEN A WING FELL OFF. HE LANDED IN A TREE. STANLEY WAS THE FIRST AMERICAN TO WIN THE GOLDEN C, ONE OF SOARING'S MOST COVETED AWARDS.
Lieut. Stanley
CAPTAIN PETER RIEDEL, AIR ATTACHE AT THE GERMAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON, ROSE FOR A 10-MINUTE OBSERVATION FLIGHT AT WINSLOW, ARIZ.--AND LANDED IN A PASTURE NUMBED WITH COLD 8 HOURS LATER AND 300 MILES AWAY! HE HAD COMPLETED THE FIRST NON-STOP SAILPLANE FLIGHT OVER THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE. HE HAD BEEN LOST MOST OF THE TIME!

Coming Soon: Alice Gibson—Parachute Queen

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Warden Bait

By JIM KJELGAARD
Author of "Crying Hound", "'I,' Said The Sparrow," etc.

One thing about dogs is, they never seem to understand anything about the law. And vice versa. . .

THE COLD water of Mugger Creek washed the color from the bottom twelve inches of his blue jeans as Wayne McCloud plastered his lean body against a two-ton boulder at the foot of a quiet pool.

A whip-like fishing rod, from the tip ferrule of which dangled six feet of line and three feet of gossamer leader, was in his right hand. Wayne took a grasshopper from the beer bottle that was jammed into his hip pocket, and put it on the hook at the end of the leader.

Expertly he flicked the grasshopper to the riffles at the head of the pool. Kicking and struggling, it floated gently down; and when it reached the center a little ripple broke the water. Wayne struck, and lifted out a four-inch trout.

With wet hands he worked the hook out of its mouth and dropped the little fish back into the water. Then he opened the cover of the creel that swung at his shoulder and looked at the three ten-inch rainbows there. Frowning, he impaled the hook in the cork butt of the rod and started back downstream.

Fifty feet down a police dog leaped from a little bunch of evergreens, seized Wayne's leg in jaws that pinched gently, and leaped away again with his front quarters plastered to the ground and his hind quarters in the air. Tail wagging furiously, tongue drooling from happy mouth, he barked, inviting Wayne to play.

"You, Wolf," a voice said. "Come here, Wolf."

A fine buck came to the edge of the cutover and ran on. The baying of the hound became clearer, more distinct

Wayne looked up in apparent surprise, though he had known that Lem Knowles and Mike DeVere had been following him since he had started fishing. Lem was the local warden. Mike was his Dabbit Run deputy.

"How do, Lem," Wayne said, overly cordial. "How do, Mike."

The dog, one ear foolishly askew over his eye, was off at a mad gallop toward a gray squirrel that showed itself for an instant on a fallen log.

Having plenty of speed, but lacking in control, the dog struck a stump, fell over it, and tumbled end over end three times

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before he regained his feet. Still grinning happily, he returned to conduct an extensive research into a crayfish burrow on the bank of the creek.

"That's a fine dog you got there, Lem," Wayne said. "It's a very fine dog."

" 'Tain't mine," Lem Knowles grunted. "Let's see your fish."

Wayne emptied the three rainbows in the leaves at Lem's feet. "I always said," he remarked virtuously, "that three trout like that are enough for anybody. As for keeping small ones—well, I got my opinion of a man who'd do it."

Lem regarded him skeptically. Wayne was Patten County's most notorious game outlaw. It was Lem's fondest ambition to put him in jail, which he could do if he caught him because Wayne never had enough money to pay the smallest fine.

But, for all his experience as a warden, and his knowledge of poachers and their ways, Lem hadn't yet been able to trip Wayne up. It was a catch-as-catch-can feud between the two with no holds barred except foul ones and the best man winning. Wayne, Lem glumly admitted, had always been the best man.

WAYNE stooped and patted the police dog's ears. It was Mike DeVere's dog, as he had known. Mike was a Dabbit Runner who was eager to exchange his deputy's job for a full-time warden's job and the steady salary it commanded.

Being the only Dabbit Runner who would inform on his neighbors, he was chiefly valuable to Lem as a stool-pigeon. But he was always importing various aids that he hoped would assist him towards his hoped-for goal of becoming a warden.

Wayne suspected that the police dog was the latest addition to these.

"That dog will be a big help to you, Mike, when you get him trained," he said.

Safe in Lem Knowles' presence, Mike smiled condescendingly, "He's only a puppy," he said. "When I get him going right you outlaws can look out."

"I guess that's right," Wayne agreed heartily. "I always said there's nothin' like a dog to help a man. They're man's best friend, that's what they are. Well, I guess I'll be goin'."

"I'm goin' your way," Lem said. "Come on and I'll give you a ride."

Lem ran his little car into Wayne's dooryard and came to a dust-clouded stop. Two huge black-and-tan hounds strained at the ends of their chains in the shade of a grove of maples and set up a thunderous baying welcome.

The police dog, who had ridden all the way from the head of Mugger Creek with his head and most of his body out of the window, howled himself into a mild hysteria and fell out of the car. Clumsily he galloped over to the hounds. Tails wagging stiffly, the three dogs became acquainted.

Lem stared at the hounds, and looked back at Wayne.

"New dogs?" he inquired.

"I bought 'em from Joey Oaks," Wayne explained. "I never did try them out, and of course don't expect to until the legal training season opens. I don't know if they're any good or not."

"Look good," Lem commented.

Wayne shrugged. "Hope they are. Well, I got to get these fish fryin'."

Joey Oaks had been Wayne's partner in an illegal but highly profitable still in Gadabout Hollow. Ten days ago Joey had been surprised at the still by a posse of revenue men, but had managed to get away by employing dexterous footwork. Joey always had been the best runner anywhere around.

Supposedly he had left the country, but actually he was temporarily abiding in Mist Swamp. Though Wayne had no proof, he was sure that Mike DeVere had turned him and Joey in, and knew Mike was disappointed because both of them hadn't been caught.

Joey was lurking in the swamp until one of the men he had guided on a deer hunt came down from Buffalo and bought the dogs. They were good dogs, the best, and the hunter had offered Joey three hundred dollars for the pair.

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Joey needed the money so he could get an outfit together and hit for the north woods. Wayne and he had thought it best for Joey to get out of Dabbit Run for a year or more, and Joey had always wanted to go north anyway.

Unfortunately, the larger of the two hounds, though a very good coon dog, was also obsessed with the idea that he had been born to hunt deer, which he chased at every opportunity. The owner of any dog found chasing deer laid himself open to a fifty-dollar fine and his dog was killed.

It made no difference to the hunter who wanted Joey's hounds whether they chased deer or not, since he wasn't going to use them in a deer country. But it wouldn't do anybody any special good if Lem Knowles found out that the dog would run deer.

Wayne sauntered carelessly into his kitchen, in the front part of his house. But once there, he threw the trout on the table and ran to the back room where he slid a piece of tin away from a peep-hole. He saw Mike DeVere, after glancing covertly at the house, lift up the door that covered the trunk of Lem Knowles' car and rummage there until he drew out a withered deer's foot.

THE scent of a deer is the most pungent of all forest scents. Even after a deer has been dead a year or more, a hoof from it will emit a strong odor. The big hound strained to the end of his chain and thrust his muzzle out as Mike came nearer. His tail was stiffly erect; his nose drank in the alluring odor. A deep bellow burst from his lungs.

Wayne went back into the kitchen, frowning thoughtfully. For the past two years Mike had been trying to find out whether either of Joey's hounds would run deer. He hadn't succeeded because Joey had publicly promised Mike a licking if he ever caught him fooling around anything of his.

Wayne frowned again. He suspected Mike of knowing that Joey was hiding, and that Joey had to sell the hounds in order to get away.

Lem Knowles came to the door.

"Stay for supper?" Wayne asked politely.

"Guess not," the warden answered. "I'll be pushing off."

Lem climbed into his car and drove away. Mike DeVere snapped a chain on the police dog and started for his house on Timber Creek. He lived there alone, a half mile from Wayne's house. Wayne set about finishing his supper.

Lem Knowles, he knew, would gladly arrest him and put him in jail. But Lem was fair in all he did. Instead of bearing Lem any animosity, Wayne both liked and respected him.

Wayne was conscious of no sin when he took game and fish for his own use, even though he some times took them out of season. Obviously the game in the forests and the fish in the streams had been put there for those who needed them. Using them was far better than running to the county relief board, a figurative tin cup held beseechingly in hand.

But Mike DeVere was a different proposition. If he had any scruples nobody had ever heard of them. Mike got a twenty-five percent cut of all fines collected in Dabbit Run. He had probably got five or ten dollars from the revenue agents for revealing the location of Wayne's and Joey's still, and he would stoop to anything that gave him a reason to collect a fine.

He knew now that Joey Oaks' big hound would run deer; and Wayne suspected that if Mike had his way the hound would soon be running deer.

If that happened Wayne would go to jail for fifty days because he lacked both fifty dollars and the slightest idea about how to get it. Besides, if one hound got shot, the hunter who wanted them might not take the remaining one; and in any case Joey Oaks would be out at least half the money he needed.

Wayne finished his supper and fed the hounds. Then he went back into his

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house and sat for a long while with his chin in his hands.

The hunter would be down from Buffalo to get the dogs in two weeks. Wayne wouldn't trust anyone else to keep the hound until that time and he couldn't take him to Joey because the dog had a voice that he wasn't at all averse to using. A hound's bay in the woods out of season always called for an investigation.

Night was gathering when Wayne struck up the fire trail that led over Duck Mountain, in back of his house. He walked across the top of the mountain, into the valley beyond, and up to the top of the next mountain. Mist Swamp, already blanketed by the mist that gave it its name, lay beneath him. Three times Wayne imitated the bark of a red fox.

From the swamp Joey answered. They met and talked earnestly for half an hour.

WAYNE spent the next two days hacking with a hoe at his weed-choked garden, making inconsequential repairs on his house; but mostly just lolling in the sun.

Wayne's gardening was conducted on an original scheme. Obviously a garden that had to be cultivated would interfere seriously with a man's fishing. But at least a few vegetables were necessary to the well-being of any Dabbit Runner.

Therefore the proper procedure was to plant twice as many vegetables as any one man needed. Weeds never killed more than half of them, so he got a year's crop without all the bother of having to care for it.

The third morning, his gardening done and his house in no immediate need of repairs, he wandered idly to the front porch and threw himself down in a dilapidated chair.

Lazily he contemplated the Dabbit Run scene: the rocky fields flanking both sides of Mugger Creek, the hawk wheeling over the summit of Branch Mountain and, down the road, Grandma Nesbitt leading a cantankerous red-and-white yearling toward her house, a quarter mile above Wayne's.

Wayne centered his attention on this, the most active part of an otherwise inanimate landscape. Grandma Nesbitt, a tremendously vital old lady whose "yarbs" were present whenever any of Dabbit Run got sick, belabored the stubborn yearling with a short stick.

Head bent, protesting every inch of the way, the yearling fought the rope about its horns. Finally, directly in front of Wayne's house, it jerked away from Grandma Nesbitt and with tail high careened past Wayne's barn. Hands on her hips, Grandma Nesbitt looked after it.

"I swan!" she ejaculated. "Got away from me quicker'n scat!"

Wayne vaulted the porch rail. "I'll get it for you," he offered. "You go on home, Grandma."

She smiled. "Will ye, Wayney? That's right kindly of ye, I'm sure."

Wayne stalked the now grazing yearling, and made a dive at the trailing rope. He missed by inches. The yearling kicked up its heels and ran farther. Wayne followed across his meadow and into the woods, but the yearling was almost three-quarters of the way up Duck Mountain before he finally caught it. Grimly triumphant, he led it down to Grandma Nesbitt's house.

Nibbling on one of Grandma's prize ginger cookies, with which all his pockets were filled, Wayne started back down the road.

A few hundred feet above his own house a covey of grouse flushed from the willows beside the road, and soared across Mugger Creek. Wayne followed them with his eyes. A black dog, nose to the ground, was circling in a rocky meadow that sloped from Branch Mountain.

Wayne broke into a mad lope. Every night deer came from the mountain to play in the meadow, and the black dog over there casting for a trail was Joey Oak's bigger hound.

The hound started to bay, having worked the trail he wanted away from all the rest. Wayne splashed across Mugger Creek and ran up through the meadow. At the edge of the forest he stopped and called to the hound.

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But it was too late. The hound was running straightaway up Branch Mountain, and nobody but Joey Oaks could call him from a deer trail.

Wayne sat down. When anything a man could do was useless, it was a good idea to do nothing. It was generally those who got most excited who found themselves in the worst predicaments. Idly he picked up a handful of dust and let it sift through his fingers.

The morning sun glinted from the lights and polished hood of a car that was coming up the Dabbit Run road. Things were working out on schedule all right. It was about time for Lem Knowles to happen along.

The car pulled into Wayne's dooryard and stopped. Wayne saw Lem and Mike DeVere get out of it. Rising to his feet, he started down to join them.

NEVER a steady trail barker, the hound was baying at sporadic intervals. Mike DeVere stood on the road searching the side of Branch Mountain with a pair of field glasses.

That, Wayne decided as he drew near, was a bit of theatrical performance staged solely for his benefit. Mike knew darned well that he couldn't see a hound or anything else through the trees no matter what kind of glasses he used.

Wayne climbed from Mugger Creek up onto the road. "Looks like a job for you, Lem," he called.

"Know what that hound's doin'?" Lem inquired.

"It sounds to me—" Wayne started and stopped as if to get his breath. "It sounds to me like he might be runnin' deer. I ran all the ways up there to see if I could stop him, but I couldn't do it."

"You know whose hound it is?" Mike DeVere asked.

"Wouldn't have the least idea."

"It wouldn't," Mike's voice was unpleasantly suggestive, "it wouldn't be your hound?"

Wayne laughed. "My gosh no! I took that big hound up to Ed Meeks last night. Ed wants to mate him up with that white bitch he's got there."

He led the way to the maple grove and picked up the length of chain that dangled from the kennel where the biggest hound had been chained.

"See that?" he asked. "Anybody might think that that chain had been cut with a chisel to make it look like the hound had broke it, mightn't they? Anybody might think so if I didn't tell 'em I'd took the hound away last night."

Lem stroked his chin, and looked at the empty kennel. There was about him a great air of amusement. After years of trying to catch Wayne—years of stalking to get him in an unguarded moment—something, he didn't know what, had dumped the big chance right in his lap. He spoke with an air of detachment.

"We'll have to get him. Mike, suppose you take your gun and saunter out to Ringneck Hollow. He might try to cross there."

Lem took a 30-30 carbine from his car. He moved placidly, composedly, as a man will who has at last accomplished a difficult job. He had Wayne by the neck, but he did not lose sight of the fact that Wayne was still as slippery as a handful of grease. On more than one previous occasion Lem had had him almost as tight.

What Wayne would do if left alone could only be guessed at, but the chances were ninety to one that he knew some way of cutting across the hills and catching the hound. He knew every deer trail in Dabbit Run.

Lem sprung his trump card.

"I'll have to deputize you," he said. "I might need help."

"Me?" Wayne touched a hand to his breast. "Shucks, Lem, that ain't hardly right. I live here. What would people say if I went around shooting their hounds? Not that I wouldn't be glad to help you catch a law-breaker. But you know how it is."

Lem shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I can deputize anybody I want."

"But—"

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Wayne could not repress more than a slight admiration for the expression of painful duty on the warden's face. When circumstances demanded, he couldn't do much better himself. Reluctantly he got to his feet.

A man could be fined for spitting over the wrong shoulder nowadays. There was a twenty-five dollar fine for refusing to assist an officer of the law.

"All right," he said grudgingly.

THE air became sultry as the sun got higher. Together the two men paced up the dusty Dabbit Run road. A mile up the road Branch Mountain was cut by a broad valley that divided it from the next mountain.

The sun shone through the blue haze in the valley, and set heat waves dancing there. The hound was running so far back now that they could scarcely hear it.

"Where do you think he'll go?" Lem asked.

Wayne studied the valley and Branch Mountain with a great air of knowing what he was doing.

"He ain't goin' to stay there," he asserted. "He's almost sure to cut down the south slope of Branch, cross Cedar Creek, and go into them peaks in the Lynx country. We come the wrong way, Lem, and might never catch that hound now. Let's go back."

Lem Knowles still appeared vastly amused over something.

"Now my guess," he said, "is that that deer's goin' to run for a while on Branch Mountain. He'll go into all them laurel thickets on the side. When he starts gettin' tired he's goin' to run into Mink Gully, across the clearin' where all them logs was cut, and head for Sun Pond. We can get the hound at the head of Mink Gully when he starts over. Now, ain't that more reasonable?"

Wayne shook his head solemnly, though he knew that the deer would do exactly as Lem had said he would do.

Lem plunged down the bank, crossed Mugger Creek, and started up the valley. Wayne followed silently. The heat of the sun became a little more intense. Unaccustomed to climbing, Lem was sweating profusely when they got to the head of the valley. Halfway up the slope that rose from it, he stopped to rest.

"Lem," Wayne asked, "did Mike know you'd be in today?"

"He knew it," Lem Knowles replied.

Wayne continued, "Did you pick him up at his house, or on the road?"

The warden looked at him suspiciously. "He was on the road. Why?"

Wayne shrugged. "Oh, nothin'."

They toiled to the top of the mountain. The baying of the hound became clearer, more distinct. They walked around the rim of Mink Gully to its head.

The deer, a fine buck, came to the edge of the cutover, paused there a second, and ran on. He was scarcely a third of the way across the clearing when the hound appeared. Nose to the trail, the hound rapidly closed the gap between himself and the deer. Both disappeared into the hemlocks. From the trees, a bedlam of shrill howls and yelps told of quarry overtaken.

A dozen feet from the waiting men, his tongue hanging and flanks heaving, the weary buck staggered to the crest of the hill. He stumbled, almost fell, and gathered himself to run on. At his heels, yapping hysterically, snapping ineffectually at the buck's legs, and stumbling over everything in sight, galloped Mike DeVere's police dog.

LEM KNOWLES swore, dropped his rifle, and in a flying leap pinned the dog to the earth. The buck staggered a few paces farther and slowed to a walk. Lem subdued the wriggling puppy.

When, in the hemlocks, the voices of the dogs had changed, he had known that something was amiss. But it was too late to do anything about it. He looked at Wayne enviously. Wayne had been in the bag and it had been sewed tight, but somehow he had managed to get out again.

Lem accepted his defeat gracefully.

"You know," he said, "when that dog

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came across the cutover I could have swore it was your hound."

"It sure looked like him," Wayne agreed. "But I knew it wasn't because I took my hound away like I told you. By the way, Lem, how much will this cost Mike?"

Lem Knowles hesitated. If it became known in Dabbit Run that his deputy, a man officially connected with the game department of the state, had broken the law, every Dabbit Runner would consider himself free to poach as he saw fit and the little respect for the law that Lem had managed to instill would be shattered.

Lem looked at Wayne, whom he knew for an outlaw but a fair man.

"Name Mike's punishment," he said quietly. "I'll see that it's carried out."

"Relieve him of all official duties for sixteen days," Wayne said steadily.

"Why?" Lem asked, startled.

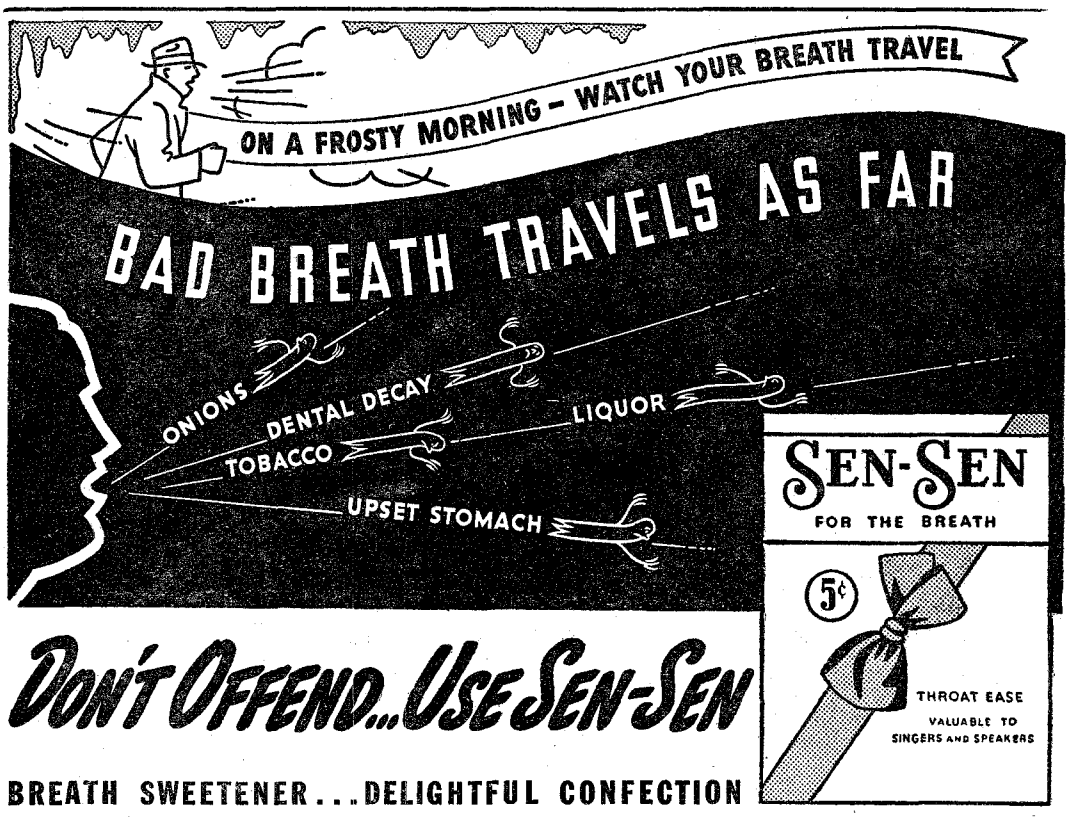
"So's he can't go foolin' around people's hounds with deer feet and steel chisels for that much time."

Lem Knowles nodded. "All right."

Wayne smiled sadly, and peered into the hemlock thicket where Joey Oaks had waited with Mike's police dog. It was well to have an understanding now and then, and Wayne's understanding with Joey had been that Joey hang around close to Wayne's for two or three days.

If at any time the big hound should get loose and start running deer, Joey was to get Mike DeVere's dog, cut the deer trail, catch the hound, and turn Mike's dog loose.

Joey had certainly proven again that he could cover ground faster than anybody else in Dabbit Run. By this time he was probably well on his way back. The hound would be chained to his kennel again in half an hour.



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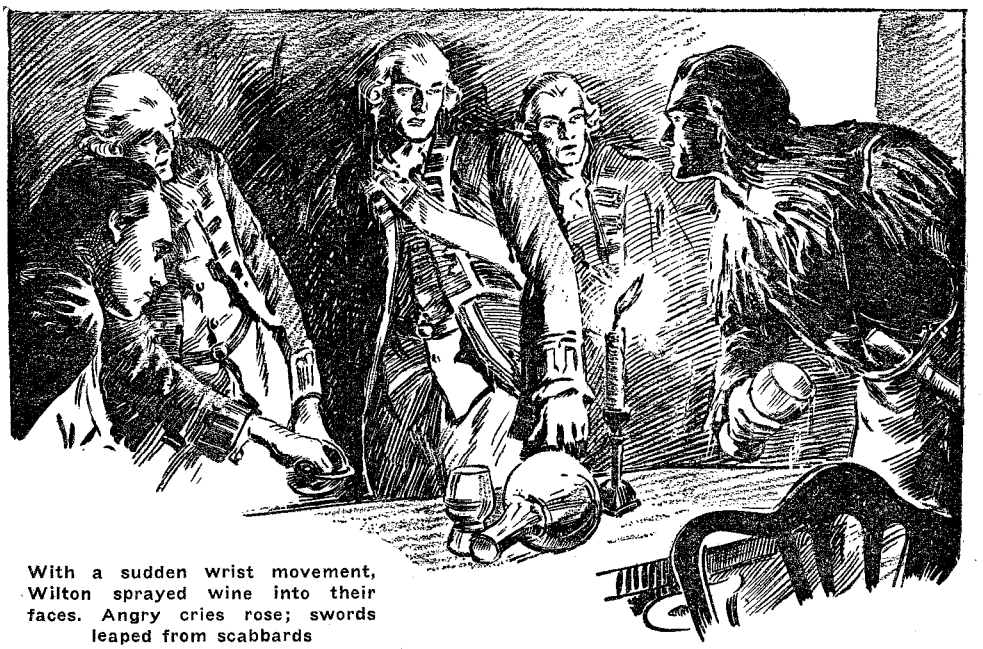

With a sudden wrist movement, Wilton sprayed wine into their faces. Angry cries rose; swords leaped from scabbards

Course of Empire

By PHILIP KETCHUM

Author of "England, Farewell," "The Long Journey," etc.

A Wilton for America! On that September morning in '59, when Wolfe met Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham, the tide of battle was determined by a silent warrior—*Bretwalda!*

I

THEY had about five minutes together in the early dawn of that second September morning in 1759. It was a bright, clear morning and the sharpness of the winter was in the air.

Rose-tinted clouds hovered on the horizon. Captain Andrew Wilton stared at them and the thought came to him that never again, so long as he lived, would he be able to face another dawn without thinking back to this moment.

"Don't hold it against General Wolfe," said the tall, thin man standing at his side. "Wolfe would have saved me if he could; but the evidence against me was too damning."

"A framework of lies," Wilton answered between his teeth. "Every word against you a lie."

"Nay, Andrew," said his brother. "It was no lie that French gold was found buried under my tent; that the dispatches I was carrying the other night had been opened and tampered with; that I have slipped away on several occasions to visit someone within the French lines."

"Lucie de Cournal," Wilton said bitterly.

"But not the Lucie de Cournal who was described at the court martial. The girl I went to see was no siren, no adventuress."

Andrew Wilton's hands were tightly clenched and there was a sharp tension in

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every line of his body. He and his brother had been over this same ground many times before. There was nothing to be gained now through a review of the case.

How John could take it all so calmly he couldn't understand. Why he couldn't see the part the woman had played in the game, he didn't know. The dying words of a French spy, whispered to Colonel Stanhope, had definitely implicated her; and advices from English spies within Quebec had verified her part in the plot.

"Who buried the gold in my tent I do not know," his brother continued, "but I am not concerned with that now, Andrew. Innocent men have died before for the sins of others. It is one of the tricks life sometimes plays on a man. I should have liked to live long enough to see Wolfe take Quebec; for I have a feeling that he will."

Andrew Wilton couldn't look at his brother. He kept his eyes fixed on those rose-tinted clouds on the horizon. The rose was turning to a golden color and soon, he knew, the sun would be up. With the coming of the sun . . .

"ANDREW," John Wilton continued, "I want you to listen carefully to me for a minute. I want you to listen to every word that I say. You are impetuous, hot-tempered. What has happened to me is going to leave your nerves on edge, is going to fill you with thoughts of revenge. I can sense that in you now. I can see the bitterness you feel in the lines around your mouth. It won't do. You've got to get over it."

"Get over it?" Wilton said huskily.

The taller man nodded. "You are a soldier, Andrew, a soldier in a British army. There is a long tradition back of the Wiltons. They have always placed their country before themselves. I want you to do something for me. Will you?"

"Anything, John."

"It is this. For two months, now, Wolfe has laid seige to Quebec without any apparent result. Abroad, France and England are engaged in a bitter war and this struggle here is but a part of it, yet to my mind the most important part.

"Here on the St. Lawrence river the question as to whether the New World is to be French or English will be decided. So long as the French hold Quebec they hold the upper hand. It is a city built on a rock with natural fortifications greater than men could build and its garrison outnumbers our army, four to one.

"Yet despite those odds, it must be taken. The task which Wolfe faces is well nigh impossible. Many of his officers are discouraged. There is talk that he is about to give up; but the man will not give up, Andrew. I have felt that all along."

Andrew Wilton scuffed his feet impatiently. "What do you want me to do, John?"

"I want you to forget all thought of revenge. I want you to bear all the insults you will have to face as the brother of a traitor. I want you to stay by James Wolfe until the English flag waves over the citadel in Quebec."

The two men were standing in front of the prison tent at the edge of Wolfe's camp at Montmorency, several miles above Quebec; and now a detail of men appeared suddenly from one side and came marching forward. At the sight of them a steel hand seemed to close tightly on Andrew Wilton's heart and his breath began coming faster.

"Will you promise me that, Andrew?" John asked.

Wilton looked at his brother, unashamed of the mist that filmed his eyes. There was a faint smile on John's lips, a calm serenity in his face.

"Don't think that it isn't hard for me to take this," John was saying, "but the harder task is yours. Death solves all problems for those who die, by passing those problems on to the living. I am waiting for your promise, Andrew."

Wilton put out his hand and clasped the hand of his brother. "Until our flag is over the citadel," he said huskily.

The detail halted a few paces away and the officer in charge presented an order

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to the captain of the guard who had been watching the brothers closely.

"Do not come with me, Andrew," John said slowly. "This is something I would rather face alone."

"I will come with you."

"No."

"John Wilton!" called the officer of the detail.

John Wilton's hand rested for a moment on Andrew's shoulder and Andrew felt the pressure of his fingers. Then quite suddenly that hand was removed and the prisoner turned around and walked over to where the detail waited.

Andrew blinked the tears from his eyes. The thickness in his throat almost choked him. He was aware of a violent, hammering ache in his head. He heard a mumbled order, saw the detail wheel around and start away, saw John raise an arm in a gesture of farewell.

He tried, or it seemed to him that he tried, to move after that detail; but he didn't move a step from where he was standing. The top of the morning sun reached up over the trees on the horizon and its glaring brilliance struck him in the eyes.

A bugle call woke the camp to life. Then, just as its last notes were echoing across the camp, there came a sudden, sharp rattle of musketry from the direction of the forest, the direction which the detail had taken.

ANDREW WILTON straightened. He was a tall young man, slender and thin of face. He had blond hair and blue eyes, wide lips which could twist into an easy smile. But there was no smile on them now and the expression in his eyes was cold and hard.

Someone stepped up to him and a voice said, "Come on, Andrew. Morning drill as usual. Your men will be waiting for you."

Without even recognizing the speaker, Andrew Wilton turned around and started marching back toward his quarters.

Captain Andrew Wilton moved through the details of his work that morning with no conscious realization of what he was doing. For three hours he drilled his command, moving them back and forth across the parade ground as had been the custom each day.

And if there were curious or sullen looks in the eyes of any of his men or in the glances of any of the other officers, he was unaware of it.

He did not know, either, that there was a new sharpness to his voice as he barked commands, that there was a whip of steel in every tone.

The drill finished he returned to his tent, washed and shaved; then in uniform once more he moved outside and walked over to where he could see the St. Lawrence river.

English batteries, from a point on the other side, were again shelling Quebec. They had been at it, now, almost since the day of Wolfe's arrival, but to little effect. Here and there were ships on the river, all of them English ships.

Between this camp and Quebec lay Beauport. Wolfe had tried an assault on that little town; but the French defenders there were heavily entrenched, and had driven the English back.

"Until our flag is on the citadel," Wilton muttered, staring toward the French stronghold. "Until our flag is on the citadel."

"What's that, Andrew?" asked a voice.

Wilton whirled around. At his shoulder stood Captani Henry Page, short, heavy, round-faced. Like Andrew and his brother, Page was from Virginia. There were a good many Americans or Colonials in this English army, for the British colonies had suffered greatly at the hands of the French and their Indian allies.

A brief smile, gone almost at once, touched Wilton's lips. "I said only that I was looking forward to the time when we would take Quebec," he answered.

Page scowled. "Wolfe is sick again. What keeps him alive I do not know. There is more talk that he will turn back."

"Not Wolfe. He has never turned back. John told me—" Wilton stopped speaking.

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"Maybe I shouldn't say this right now," Page muttered, "but those of us who knew your brother know that he wasn't a traitor, Andrew. It was Wolfe's damnable discipline that was responsible for what happened to him. That, and the English officers who made up the court which tried him."

Wilton didn't answer and after a moment Page said, "Wolfe is running this discipline of his into the ground. He insists that we drill our men until they are almost ready to drop. He holds to the rules he sets down as if they were given to him by God. His punishment for the disobedience of an order is so severe that I do not see why men put up with it."

"Yet the men love him," Wilton answered slowly.

THE two men turned and started back toward the camp. It was just after the noon hour and this was a time of rest. Here and there men were lounging about their tents or had gathered in groups for casual conversation or at games of cards.

Near General Wolfe's headquarters were a good many officers. Shade trees were there, sheltering benches; and custom had made of this spot a gathering place for the leaders of the army.

Wilton headed that way but Page grasped his arm and said, "Come to my tent, Andrew. I have a letter from home you would like to read."

Wilton shook his head. "Later."

"Now, Andrew."

They had stopped not far from a group of officers. While they hesitated Wilton heard someone say clearly, "Montcalm has always known every move we made. Maybe now that the traitor is dead we can accomplish something."

A sharp wave of anger swept over Wilton's body. He said again to Page, "Later," and then he moved on forward so that he stood very close to that group of officers.

"Shut up, you fool," one of them hissed.

The man who had spoken first looked around and caught sight of Andrew Wilton. He was a young British officer, pink-cheeked, clear of eye. His name was Thomas Brandt and he was a major in Lascelles' regiment.

Near him stood Colonel Stanhope, one of Wolfe's aides, and Captain Hardy of the Royal American regiment. Stanhope was a thin-faced, elderly man with a close-clipped white mustache and iron gray hair. Hardy was large, wide-shouldered, dark-skinned.

"Why should I shut up?" Brandt said sharply. "He was a traitor and he has died a traitor's death. And it seems to me that I smell a foul odor in the air."

"Stop it, you fool," Stanhope ordered.

Wilton's lips were pressed tightly together. It was situations such as this, he realized, to which his brother had referred that morning. It was this that John had asked him to bear, insults to his brother's memory, insults to his own name.

A MOCKING sneer was on Brandt's lips and there was a bright glitter to his eye. "Do you not hear me?" he asked. "I said that I smelled a foul odor, such an odor as comes only through contamination with the French."

He was looking directly at Wilton as he spoke and over the officers near him and all those around Wolfe's tent there was a sharp, strained silence.

Wilton was rigid. Every impulse that he knew called upon him to step forward and ram those words down the young officer's throat; but a steel will held him.

"Must I make my words more pointed?" Brandt asked scornfully. "What would you say to this?"

He stepped forward then, lifted his hand and slapped Wilton lightly across the face.

Andrew Wilton lifted a hand to his cheek and a seething anger made the hand unsteady. He stared from side to side. Nowhere did his eyes meet a friendly look. Under his breath he said, "John, you wouldn't have asked this. You wouldn't have asked me to take this."

"Cowardice runs in the family," Brandt laughed. "Does anyone have a whip?"

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Wilton took a step toward the man, stopped as a sharp voice called his name. whirled around toward Wolfe's tent. The flap had been thrown back and General James Wolfe stood in the entrance. His was not an imposing figure. He was slight of build, pale-faced. His flaming red hair was all awry and there were deep shadows under his eyes.

"Captain Wilton," said Wolfe bluntly, "you will go at once to your quarters and confine yourself to your tent until further orders."

Wilton saluted. He said flatly, "Yes, General."

"That is all," Wolfe answered.

The general stepped back inside the tent and the flap fell into place. Wilton again stared from side to side. Stanhope was frowning and so was Hardy. The sneer was still on Brandt's lips. Somewhere a man muttered, "He's finished."

Without a word, Andrew Wilton swung around and started away. He ran into some man who pushed him roughly aside but he didn't notice who it was. The derisive sound of mocking laughter followed him.

II

THE afternoon dragged by slowly. Outside on the parade ground, men marched back and forth in the endless drill. Dust kicked up by hundreds of feet sifted into the tent and sharp orders rang out through the camp.

Along toward dusk a colored servant who had followed the Wiltons north brought Wilton some food and tried to talk to him; but Wilton had nothing to say, had no stomach for the food.

It grew dark and the camp quieted down. Then suddenly, without any warning at all, the tent flap was lifted and a short slender figure moved through the entrance.

There was no light within the tent and Wilton could not see who had entered. He jerked to his feet and said gruffly, "Who are you and what do you want?"

"I wanted to talk with you, Captain Wilton," came the answer.

"General Wolfe!" Wilton gasped.

He reached for a candle, struck a light, stared wide-eyed at his visitor. There were deep lines in Wolfe's face, made more prominent by the shadows of the night, by the flickering of the candle.

Wolfe stood very straight. Though he could not hide the marks on his face, no hint of his suffering showed in his eyes.

That the man was dying of an incurable disease, that he was in constant agony, was an open secret in the camp; yet each time he faced his men there was a calmness in his expression which only a stubborn courage could have forced.

"You do not think your brother was a traitor, do you?" Wolfe said abruptly.

"I know that he wasn't," Wilton answered.

"Yet in the face of the evidence there was nothing else the court could do."

Andrew Wilton drew a ragged breath. "He was no traitor."

"Men have often criticized me," Wolfe continued, "for keeping such close counsel. I could number on the fingers of my hands the men who have been in my confidence.

"Your brother was one, for I respected his judgment. Another is Colonel Stanhope who has been with me for years. A third is Captain Hardy and a fourth, William Brandt—both young men, yet trustworthy and level-headed.

"Admiral Saunders, General Monckton, and Colonel Howe are three more. All are loyal, yet things which only those men knew were learned by Montcalm."

Wolfe's voice lowered. "Your brother's interest in this Lucie de Cournal was definitely established; and it is known that after a visit from her, Montcalm was prepared for our attack on Beauport. The French gold in your brother's tent and the fact that the dispatches with which he had been entusted had been tampered with, were other facts against him. But you know all that."

"I know all that," Wilton agreed. "But I knew John, too."

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"The ordinary spies, the deserters who move from one force to another, would not bother me. With them, one always has to contend."

Wilton said nothing. He wondered what purpose was behind this visit of Wolfe's, why Wolfe had reviewed the case against his brother.

GENERAL WOLFE moved over to the door, threw back the flap of the tent and stared across the darkened camp toward Quebec. "They have given me four thousand men to take that city," he said under his breath.

"Montcalm has many times that number. He is a clever leader. It will not be easy to surprise him. Yet I am going to take that city, and if I cannot get in the front way I will try the back."

"A few hundred men could defend the cliffs beyond Quebec," Wilton muttered.

Wolfe jerked around. "I hope to God you are wrong about your brother. I hope he was the traitor who was dealing with the French. If it was not he—"

Wolfe did not finish his sentence. He lowered the tent flap.

"If it wasn't John," Wilton breathed, "the traitor still lives. Montcalm will still learn your plans. And he will. That will be the proof that my brother—"

"Captain Wilton," Wolfe interrupted, "it is only natural that the other officers should resent your presence after what happened this morning. I have no choice but to keep you confined to your tent."

The general's words were cold and distant. There was a sharp, hard look in his eye.

"Perhaps it would be to the best of the service if you would resign your command," he added. "Consider all that I have said. I will expect to hear your decision in the morning."

That statement was like a slap in the face. A moment before General Wolfe had been almost friendly. Andrew Wilton stiffened. He said flatly. "You will have it, General."

The smaller man nodded, turned on his heel and left the tent. Wilton moved after him to the entrance, stared out across the deserted parade grounds. The night was dark and still and heavy clouds hid the stars from sight. There was a cold, sharp wind blowing from the north.

Wilton felt suddenly very weary; yet he knew that he would not be able to sleep. His nerves were too tight for that.

He thought again of all that Wolfe had said and he muttered under his breath, "The traitor still lives. It wasn't John who betrayed Wolfe's plans. It was another—Saunders, Howe, Monckton, Stanhope, Brandt or Hardy. I wonder why Wolfe mentioned those names. I wonder—"

A figure moving up through the darkness called, "I've brought you John's things, Andrew. I thought perhaps you might want them."

Wilton backed into the tent. "Come on in, Page."

Henry Page entered with a blanket-wrapped pack. He lowered it to the ground and Wilton unwrapped it.

There was not much in the bundle—shirts and sox, an extra pair of boots, two pistols and a saber, a watch which was still running, an old leather wallet, a knife, a bundle of letters.

Wilton's lips quivered as he stared down at those things. He closed his eyes on hot, salty tears.

"Thanks, Page."

"There was little else that was personal," Henry Page told him.

"Wasn't the old axe there? The one Bacchus, my father's servant, brought with him when he followed us up here?"

"You mean that old battle-axe that your brother sometimes carried with him?"

"Yes. It was an axe my grandfather used when he fought with Oliver Cromwell. He brought it with him to this country. It has been long in the family."

Page shook his head. "It wasn't in the tent."

"It's no matter," Wilton shrugged. "The axe had only a sentimental value, and sentiment took a death blow this morning."

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PAGE shifted uncomfortably on his feet but Wilton had nothing more to say. The silence between them grew strained. Page rubbed a hand over his chin.

"What about Brandt?" he asked suddenly. "There are many who do not label you as they label your brother. If you were to meet him in a duel—"

Wilton shook his head. A curious train of thought had come to him. John had insisted that he stay with Wolfe and bear all insults until Quebec had fallen—that he forego any thought of revenge.

But Wolfe, himself, had made that course impossible, unless Wolfe's visit had been for the deliberate purpose of asking him to undertake the task of discovering the identity of the traitor.

And that was essential now. How could he better serve Wolfe than through uncovering the man among his trusted allies who was responsible for sending the French word of Wolfe's plans?

"What will you do, Andrew?" Page asked.

Wilton looked up. He said slowly, "When you see Wolfe tomorrow tell him that I will give him his answer in Quebec."

"In Quebec?" Page repeated. "What answer? What do you mean?"

A tight, grim laugh came from Wilton's throat. "Just tell him that, Page. And now leave me alone. I'm—rather tired."

As soon as Page had gone Andrew Wilton turned to a box in the corner and from it he took the leather trousers and leather coat of a woodsman.

It was in such a uniform as this that he had served as a scout with Braddock, several years before. A skin hat and moccasins completed the outfit. Wilton laid that apparel aside, wrapped it in a blanket.

He took what money he had and a few personal articles and added them to those Henry Page had brought. Page, he was sure, would look after these things when it was discovered that he had gone. His pistols he left, too; for it would be fatal, he knew, to carry an English pistol where he was going. His sword followed the pistols into the discard but his knife he kept. It was long-bladed, similar to the knives carried by many woodsmen.

With the bundle of clothing under his arm, Wilton snuffed out the candle and moved to the tent's entrance. For a moment, then, he hesitated.

Once he had embarked on this crazy scheme which had come into his mind, there could be no turning back. He knew that as definitely as he had ever in his life known anything.

His brother, once, in a burst of confidence, had told him of the location of the manor house where he had met Lucie de Cournal. It was on the plains west of Quebec near the Sillery road.

He could reach that place, Wilton thought, within a few hours, by circling far to the rear of the French camps. And the lore he had picked up as a scout under General Braddock and Colonel Washington, his knowledge of the country to the west and his fair command of French —which he had learned at an academy near Boston—might enable him to pass as a French *coureur de bois*.

With a little luck he might be able to reach this woman, Lucie de Cournal; and through her, he might be able to discover the identity of the traitor.

His plan was no more formed than that. What he would do when he found Lucie de Cournal, he didn't know. He would have to let those problems take care of themselves. It was a foolhardy plan, he knew. The plan of a desperate man. But there was no other course open to him.

III

HE TURNED swiftly away from the tent, crossed to the far edge of the camp, keeping well in the shadows. He was thankful, now, that the night was cold and dark. Except for the sentries, hardly any others were abroad; and from the shelter of the last tent in a long line, he watched the shadows of those on guard.

It was not difficult for him to slip past the first line of sentries or to make his way past the outposts beyond the camp

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and at the edge of the forest. Long years before he had learned to move cautiously, silently through the night; and the skill had not left him.

Half an hour after he had left his tent he melted into the shadows of the forest. In a little clearing some distance beyond, he paused to change his clothing. That job done he wrapped his uniform in the blanket he had brought with him and looked around for a place to hide it.

"Wilton!" cried a sharp voice from the shadows behind him.

Andrew Wilton jerked around, every muscle taut, one hand slipping to the knife in his belt. The vague figure of a man moved into the clearing. There was a pistol in the man's hand.

"I thought that you might run away," the voice continued. "I watched and followed you. When I noticed that you brought no blade I secured another as we passed my tent."

"Brandt!" Wilton gasped.

The man laughed, threw off his cloak and then tossed a rapier at Wilton's feet. "Pick it up," he ordered. "England's cause would be better off if I shot you; but I have heard rumors of your skill and I would like to see how a coward can acquire such a reputation."

Wilton stooped over and picked up the rapier. Had it been a mere accident, he wondered, that Brandt had been watching his tent and had followed him—or had Brandt guessed at his mission? That question slapped across his mind but found no answer.

Brandt tossed the pistol aside, jerked out his own blade. In the half-light from the sky his face was set in harsh, grim lines. "On guard, Wilton!" he cried sharply. "Let me see how you like English steel!"

THERE was none to see that duel in the narrow clearing of the forest a little above Wolfe's camp on the Montmorency; none save such wild creatures as might have been disturbed by the clashing of steel or by the sounds of the two men's labored breathing.

They pressed back and forth across the grass, slashing out with their blades, trying first straight sword-play and after that such tricks as had been taught them through long hours of practice.

In the first few minutes of that fight, Andrew Wilton knew that he was pitted against a master. He could sense the strength of Brandt's wrist, the quickness of the man's thought. He gave ground slowly, testing his opponent by every method that he knew.

Then quite suddenly he moved to the attack; but for every trick he tried, Brandt had a foil.

Back and forth across the grass they moved, sometimes engaged in a furious exchange, sometimes with wrist locked against wrist in a test of strength. Wilton's body grew warm and perspiration broke out on his face.

Brandt, too, was suffering from the strain of the fight; and that realization gave Wilton a new courage. He sprang back, seemed to trip, threw his sword arm up as if to regain his balance.

The opening for Brandt looked perfect. Perhaps by day or with better light he would have seen that Wilton hadn't really tripped; but the fact escaped him. His rapier stabbed out and its point caught in the leather of Wilton's jacket as his body twisted away from that thrust.

A searing pain burned across Wilton's chest but he only laughed. His own blade, twisting suddenly downward, stabbed through Brandt's shoulder.

With a hoarse cry, William Brandt reeled backwards, half stumbling, his rapier dropping from his hand. Wilton lowered his point. He was breathing heavily and perspiration stung his eyes. This fight had been a close call for him, he knew.

"It's not far to camp, Brandt," he heard himself saying. "You must make it alone. I am going the other way."

Brandt straightened, holding one hand against his wounded shoulder. His face was pale; anger blazed in his eyes. "We will meet again, Wilton," he said thickly.

Andrew Wilton shrugged. He tossed the

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rapier aside, turned and started on through the forest. Far up the Montmorency he stopped and bathed the wound on his side. It was only a scratch. The bleeding had stopped.

He crossed the river and turned west, came to a trail and followed it at a steady lope. It occurred to him that perhaps John, his brother, had come this way on the nights when he had slipped off to meet Lucie de Cournal; and he wondered why John had ever become interested in such a woman.

His knowledge of his brother gave him an answer. John had ever been a dreamer, a sentimentalist. To fall in love with a French woman, to slip off to meet her, would have appealed to his imagination in the same way as did that old battle-axe which Bacchus had brought north with him.

John had liked to carry that axe about because it bore the name *Bretwalda,* which his father had translated as meaning "Ruler of Britain." And because many a Wilton in years gone by had carried that axe to victory.

A grim smile came to Andrew Wilton's lips. He forgot Brandt and the fight that was just over, forgot General Wolfe and the strangeness of the man's visit.

"You'll find me a different Wilton, Lucie de Cournal," he said half aloud. "One not so easily tricked."

THE manor house was wide and long and of two stories. It was set far back from the road and within a sheltering circle of trees. A score of saddled horses were tied to the picket fence which ran in front of it and here and there were carriages.

Music and the sound of shouting and laughter came from the crowd inside; and as he drew near the place Andrew Wilton recalled several tales he had heard of the manor house of the Seigneur de Cournal. The revelries and the carousals held here were said to rival the drinking bouts held in the Intendency in Quebec.

But De Cournal's place was supposed to be open to everyone—soldiers or townspeople, cavaliers or *coureurs de bois.* This, Wilton decided, was a point in his favor. And the lateness of the hour was another point. Minds befuddled by liquor were not quick at thought.

He staggered up to the door, very much as if he had already had too much to drink; pushed it open and wandered inside.

There were almost half a hundred people in the great dining hall, some of them gathered at the long table which was loaded with food, others at smaller tables where they were playing at cards or throwing dice. The room was warm and the air was heavy with the scent of perfume mingled with tobacco smoke.

At the far end of the place three violinists were playing a lilting air and some woman was dancing. Wilton noticed several men who were clothed in an outfit very similar to his; but most of the men there were French officers in neat blue uniforms.

Several women in gaudy silks moved through the crowd, their faces flushed, their laughter high and shrill.

All that, Andrew Wilton saw in one swift glance as he staggered forward and dropped into a chair at the table. For several moments he ate ravenously of the food within his reach; then, as no one seemed to be paying any attention to him, he began to study the crowd.

One of the serving girls stopped at his shoulder and set a flagon of wine on the table near him. She started to go on, stopped. Wilton could feel her eyes on him.

"You are new," he heard her say, her voice low and swift. "I have never seen you here before."

"I just got to Quebec," Wilton answered thickly. "I—"

The girl moved back to his side, leaned over the table and said in a whisper, "Why have you come here? Get out! Quickly! Before you are noticed."

There was a sharp urgency in the girl's tones. Wilton glanced at her. She was slender and young, fair-skinned and very dark of hair. Her breath was coming very fast and there was a tight, almost fright-

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ened expression on her face. How she had so quickly penetrated his disguise, Wilton didn't know, but the fact that she had and that she hadn't given him away was at least encouraging.

Wilton leaned toward her. "I must see Lucie de Cournal," he said under his breath.

The girl bit her lips. "What do you want of her?"

"I have a message for her," Wilton lied.

"What is the message? I will take it to her."

Wilton glanced from side to side. No one seemed interested in him or the girl. He shook his head. "Where is she? Point her out to me."

The girl's eyes moved around the room and Wilton followed her glance. He suddenly caught his breath. Leaning against the wall not far away was a tall, broad-shouldered figure in a French uniform. But the man wearing that uniform was no Frenchman. He had broad, dark features, thick bushy hair.

"Hardy," Wilton muttered. "Captain George Hardy."

"I will find Lucie, send her out back," the girl whispered. "Hurry outside before you are discovered."

AS SHE spoke the girl straightened and then moved away. Andrew Wilton did not budge. George Hardy was one of the men in Wolfe's confidence; yet here he was at the manor house of the Seigneur de Cournal in a French uniform—and apparently very much at home.

A woman in a long blue gown moved up to Hardy's side and the American flashed her a smile. They started whispering together. The woman wore a powdered wig and her gown was cut very low. Her shoulders looked smooth and soft.

Hardy laughed at something that she said and turned and glanced around the room. His look passed Wilton, came back again.

By the expression on his face Wilton knew that the man had recognized him. Two French officers joined the woman at Hardy's side and Hardy said something to them. One of the officers moved away, started circling the room.

Wilton glanced over at the door. A moment before it had been empty; but now several officers were standing there, staring at him. He looked over his shoulder and saw that several others were regarding him suspiciously. The officer who had been talking to Hardy was with them.

It had happened as quickly as that. A moment before no one had seemed aware of his presence. Now the door was guarded and the men behind him were moving forward.

A surging excitement swept through Wilton's veins. He shot a quick look at Hardy. The woman to whom he had been talking had moved off and a Frenchman now stood on either side of Hardy. As Wilton looked that way, Hardy and the two men with him started across the room, arm in arm. Hardy looked around and there was a curious strained expression on his face.

A hand tapped Wilton on the shoulder and a man's heavy voice demanded. "What is your name, *m'sieu?*"

Wilton got to his feet, turned clumsily around. There were six or seven officers in the group which had come up behind him. Several of the men had their hands on their swords and all of them were watching him closely.

Far across the room Wilton saw Captain Hardy and several others leaving by a back door. Out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of the woman who had been talking to Hardy. She was now talking to another man and the sound of her high-pitched laughter came to Wilton's ears.

A sudden, sharp anger boiled through his veins. His glance turned to the man who stood at his side.

My name, *m'sieu,* is Père Tache," he answered.

"And where are you from?"

"From far beyond the great lakes."

"What do you think, Iberville?" asked the man of one of the others.

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A tall, thin, pale-faced Frenchman shook his head. "He is clean shaven. No *coureur de bois* ever bothered to cut his beard."

The man's tones were cold and incisive. His eyes were very sharp. Wilton leaned back against the table. He knew that he had little time. In another moment these men would grasp him, lead him outside. Perhaps he would be dragged into Quebec or perhaps they wouldn't even bother with that formality.

His hand fumbled on the table behind him, grasped a glass of wine. He half turned, started to lift it to his lips.

"You will come with us, Père Tache," said Iberville. "There is a little matter—"

IV

WITH a sudden, deliberate movement of the wrist, Wilton sprayed the contents of the wineglass into the faces of those who were standing around him. Startled and angry cries rose from that group, swords flashed from their scabbards.

Wilton threw himself forward, stabbing out with both fists. This was his only chance and he knew it. A swift and desperate bid for freedom, for an opportunity at that door and for the comparative security of the darkness outside.

A sword slashed across his shoulder and another caught him in the upper arm. From some man's hand he twisted a blade and with it he slashed out from left to right.

A stabbing pain lanced through his back and he stumbled forward. The men who had been guarding the door had left it and were rushing toward him.

Wilton's sword caught one of those men in the throat. He drew it back and cut at the other, raced for the door. Again he felt a stab of pain in his back.

His vision blurred and there was a hammering noise pounding in his ears. Above it he could hear men yelling and shouting to one another and the trample of feet behind him. Then suddenly he was outside and was stumbling around the house and toward the shelter of the trees.

Something tripped him and he went down. He tried to get up but couldn't.

"Over that way," it seemed to him that someone was shouting. "He's gone over that way."

Again Andrew Wilton tried to get up but there was no strength or feeling in his legs.

"Keep perfectly still," said a quiet voice in his ears. "Don't move."

The darkness grew thicker and the voices of those searching for him faded away. . . .

THE sun striking against Andrew Wilton's face woke him. He stared up at the ceiling of the room in which he lay, and for several minutes could not orient his thoughts.

Then as he tried to shift his body and as sharp twinges of pain shot through him he recalled all that had happened; his brother's execution, his trip to the manor house of the Seigneur de Cournal, the fight which had followed and his attempted escape.

He turned his head and stared from side to side, puzzled. This, surely, was no prison cell. The bed in which he was lying was large and soft and the room was big. There were curtains at the windows instead of bars and there was a carpet on the floor. To one side there was a high cabinet and near it a low table and an oval mirror.

A sound at the door attracted his attention; he looked that way. A tall, slender girl had entered the room. She wore a long, white cotton dress, the sleeves were rolled up above her elbows. In her hands she carried a basin, and over her shoulder was a towel.

Wilton recognized her at once. This was the girl who had come to the table at the Seigneur de Cournal's manor house, who had warned him to leave, who had promised to find Lucie de Cournal for him and have her meet him outside.

She looked younger in this morning

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light than she had the night before and there was a freshness about her face which even her somber look couldn't hide.

"You are awake this morning," she said quietly, crossing over to the table.

Wilton followed the girl with his eyes. He watched her set down the basin, turn around and move back to the bed. Her hand was cool against his forehead.

"Where am I?" he asked her, and his voice was strangely weak.

"This is my room in the manor house," the girl answered. "I brought you here three nights ago after the—trouble downstairs."

"Three nights ago?" Wilton gasped.

The girl nodded. She folded down the covers, bent over and studied the bandage around Wilton's chest. "I think we won't disturb this," she said after a moment. "Your fever seems to have gone down. Perhaps—"

"Who are you?" Wilton demanded.

"Marie Gamache. I work here for the *seigneur*."

"Does he know—"

The girl shook her head. "When you fled from the hall downstairs you stumbled and fell near the corner of the house, in the shadow of a clump of bushes. All of those who followed you thought you had got much farther. I pulled you around back and up the back stairs. You—you were very heavy and you didn't help me much."

"You knew that I was not French," Wilton said. "How did you guess? Why did you bring me here?"

THE girl bit her lips. She turned away from the bed, crossed over to the window. After a moment's silence, Wilton heard her saying, "You looked very much like another man who used to come here. At first I thought you were that other."

"That other man was my brother," Wilton said in a low voice.

The girl didn't turn. She made no answer.

"He came here," Wilton went on, "to see this Lucie de Cournal."

"And you came to see her. Why?"

Wilton stared up at the ceiling. "I came to find out from her what man it is who has been betraying Wolfe's plans to the French. My brother was arrested, was tried and was executed as a traitor."

The girl swung around. Her face seemed very pale. "Your brother was—executed. You mean—"

"John was no traitor," Wilton said slowly. "I saw the man who betrayed Wolfe in that hall downstairs. I saw him talking to this Lucie de Cournal. He saw me there, pointed me out to others and then went outside thinking that I would be taken. I must get back to the English camp. I must warn—"

He tried to lift himself up from the bed but again, as he moved, those sharp pains shot through him and a film came over his eyes. As if from a great distance away he heard the girl's soothing voice and then he felt her hands on his shoulders holding him down.

He must have lost consciousness, then; for when he next opened his eyes it was dark and from below he could hear the murmur of voices and the vague noise of laughter and an occasional muffled shout.

For a long time he lay there in the bed listening to the sounds of merriment from below. He could think more clearly now. This girl—Marie Gamache she had said her name was—had recognized him because of his likeness to his brother. Through some whim she had saved him from being taken by the French.

But she herself was French and how far he could trust her he did not know.

In some way or other he had to get word to Wolfe, word of Hardy's visit here; and the surest way was to carry that word himself. In spite of the pain in his chest he forced himself up in bed. A wave of dizziness swept over him and he dropped back.

He couldn't make it tonight, but tomorrow night—

The door of the room opened softly and Marie came inside. She crossed to the bed, stared down at him, let her hand rest for a moment on his forehead; then mov-

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ing back to the door, she locked it.

From the far corner of the room he heard the rustle of her clothing; and when a moment later she moved through the faint light from the window, Wilton saw that she had on a nightgown.

Again she came up to the bed and looked down at him; then stooping over she drew several folded blankets from beneath it, spread them out on the floor and lay down. After a while he heard the even sound of her breathing and knew that she had gone to sleep.

V

ON SEPTEMBER third, General Wolfe abandoned the camp at Montmorency, loaded his men on Admiral Saunders' transports and sailed across the river to Point Levy.

After several days there the men were again loaded on the transports and some of the ships sailed up the St. Lawrence past Quebec to a place across from Cap Rouge. Other ships sailed downriver or around the Isle of Orleans.

The French knew at once of the abandonment of the camp at Montmorency. They guessed that it was predicated on one of two things. Wolfe was either about to make an attack or he was getting ready to withdraw. Most of the French soldiers and most of the people in Quebec were inclined to the latter point of view.

Word of what was happening was brought to Andrew Wilton by Marie Gamache one evening just at dusk. "They are leaving," she said to him positively. "Quebec could never be taken by as few men as Wolfe has with him. He has realized that at last."

Wilton shook his head. "How little you know of Wolfe. He is not leaving."

"Why do you think that?"

"I know the man," Wilton answered.

Marie shrugged her shoulders. "You will see. Now eat your supper."

The girl had brought him bread and meat rolled up in a cloth and in another cloth she had brought a bottle of wine. Wilton was much stronger. His wounds had healed over but he knew that too great a strain would start them bleeding again. He began to eat slowly, now and then glancing over toward the girl who stood at the window.

The past ten days had been as strange as any he had ever known. He had seen no one but Marie and a close companionship had grown up between them. Twice a day she had brought him food and each night she had slept there on the blankets at the side of his bed.

To his insistance that she take the bed and he the blankets, she had only smiled and shaken her head. When he had asked her what would happen to her should his presence be discovered, she had shrugged her shoulders and answered, "That won't happen. No one ever comes to my room."

Three days before he had asked her about Hardy, had described the man, had said, "He was the large, dark-faced man in the French uniform leaning against the wall and talking to Lucie Cournal at the time you stood at the table with me."

"Oh, that man," said Marie.

"Has he been back?"

"No. He hasn't been back."

"Will you tell me if he does come back, Marie?"

"I will tell you," Marie had promised.

And now, thinking of Hardy and of what the girl had said about the English army, Wilton asked about the man.

"He hasn't been here," Marie answered. "Why are you interested in him?"

Wilton threw back the covers of the bed. He sat up, swung his feet to the floor. "Marie," he said abruptly, "I am leaving here tonight."

The girl caught her breath. "No! You can't. You are not able to leave."

"Today while you were gone I walked back and forth across the room a score of times. I can make it, Marie."

The girl shook her head. She was biting her lips and her hands were clenched at her sides.

"I have to go, Marie," Wilton said simply. "But I didn't want to run away with-

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out telling you that I was going—without thanking you for what you have done for me."

MARIE came slowly forward. In the quickly gathering dusk her features were a white blur. "You can't go, Andrew." Her voice was very low and husky. "The English are all across the St. Lawrence. There is no way you could reach them."

"But I must try."

"You will be killed."

Something in the girl's voice sent a sudden thrill of excitement racing through Wilton's veins. "Does it mean so much to you, Marie, if another of Wolfe's men should die?"

The girl's answer was low, so low that Wilton hardly caught it. "If that man is you, Andrew."

"Marie," he cried.

The girl came forward, dropped to her knees at his side. Her head and shoulders fell across his lap and he could feel the warmth of her breast against his legs. He lifted a hand to her head, smoothed it over her hair and for a moment there was a thickness in his throat which kept him from uttering a single word.

"You mustn't leave, Andrew," he heard her whispering. "You are safe here—safe."

Wilton lifted the girl's head. He could feel the moisture of tears on her face. "I guess this had to happen," he said slowly. "From that first morning when I awoke and saw you, Marie, from that instant when you put your hand on my head, I have wanted to hold you in my arms."

"A servant girl—in a place like this?"

"A girl who risked her life to save my own, who has risked it ever minute for more than a week."

"But still a servant girl."

A deep laugh came from Wilton's throat. "A servant girl worth a thousand of such trollops as Lucie de Courval. Why did we wait so long, Marie? Why did we wait until the night when I must leave?"

"But you can't leave now."

"I must."

Marie tore herself away from him, stood up. "I—I have to go, Andrew. You will not leave until—until later. Until after I have come back."

Wilton stretched out his hands. "No, Marie. Not until later."

The girl took his hands, pressed them against her face. Then she turned and hurried across the room. "I will get away as early as I can," he heard her whisper from the doorway.

After she had gone, Andrew Wilton got to his feet and crossed unsteadily to the window. He stared for a long time out into the night, now and then laughing softly as he thought of Marie, now and then growing serious of face as his mind turned to a consideration of what might possibly lie ahead.

General Wolfe would never turn back, he knew. His abandonment of the camp at Montmorency and his movement of the men up and down the river could only mean one thing. He was determined upon an attack and was maneuvering to get his forces aligned so that the attack would come as a surprise. Only in such an event could he hope for victory.

A carriage drew up below and the sound of voices reached up to where Wilton was standing. In the banquet hall below the violinists started playing. More people arrived and now and then Wilton could make out an angry shout or a loud peal of laughter.

When he thought of Marie working down there a wave of disgust swept over him. This was no place for a girl such as she. He would be glad when he could get her out of it.

Wilton crossed back to the bed. He drew on his clothing, leaned back and smiled in the darkness. After a while he got up and stooping over, reached under the bed to pull out the blankets Marie had used, which after tonight she wouldn't need.

THE blankets had been pushed far back. He lay down on his stomach and his fingers, reaching for them, touched against something hard and cold.

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It seemed to be a piece of iron. Wilton drew it out, stared at it, caught his breath. A cold chill ran over him. This was no mere piece of iron which he had found under Marie's bed. It was an ancient battle-axe with a wide, curved head.

Andrew Wilton stood up. He lifted the axe to the bed, felt of the head. There above the cutting surface he could feel the letters which he had known would be there, and above those letters the raised points of two jewels.

This was the axe *Bretwalda,* the axe which had been in his family for so long; which Bacchus had brought north with him when he had come to Wolfe's camp, which his brother John had sometimes carried around with him; which had been missing from John's things when Page had searched his brother's tent.

But how had it come here? What was it doing under Marie's bed?

Wilton carried the axe across the room and stood it against the wall. It was heavier than he remembered it and he wondered how those ancient ancestors of his had managed to swing it as lustily as the legends said that they did. Leaving it there he moved back to the bed and lay down to wait.

The thoughts that kept him company were not pleasant ones.

The sounds from the room below thinned out. Carriages moved away and farewell greetings floated on the air. There was at last a noise at the door and in another moment Marie had entered the room.

She stood for a moment just inside the doorway and Wilton could imagine her smiling. He sat up and called her name. She came forward and once again dropped to her knees at his side.

"I couldn't come any sooner, Andrew," she whispered.

"They are all gone."

"All but a few who are still throwing dice."

"Why does De Cournal run a place like this?"

Marie hesitated a moment, then shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps he loves to gamble. Perhaps he loves crowds of people. Noise. Excitement. Perhaps—and I think this is the real reason—he does not like François Bigot, the intendent, and he gives entertainment here to rival that at the Intendency."

Wilton got to his feet. He crossed the room to where he had left the axe *Bretwalda,* lifted it and returned to the side of the bed. "Where did you get this?" he asked bluntly.

He could hear the swift sound of Marie's breath. "I—your brother left it here. He brought it to show it to Lucie de Cournal. She had no liking for it and gave it to me."

THERE was a sudden, sharp knock on the door and from the hallway the sound of a man's voice calling, "Lucie! Lucie! He is here again. You must come at once."

Marie jerked to her feet. "It is the Seigneur de Cournal," she whispered. "He must think his daughter is here. I will have to go and find her."

Again that knocking sounded on the door. Marie hurried that way, opened it. From where he stood near the bed, Andrew Wilton could hear the man and Marie whispering together. In another moment Marie had stepped out into the hall and had closed the door after her.

For the space of several seconds, Andrew Wilton didn't move. He told himself, desperately, that the suspicions in the back of his mind had no reality. But even as he fought to believe that he had to recognize that this room was finer than any servant's room he had ever seen; that here he had found the axe *Bretwalda;* that the man at the door had called for Lucie and that he had referred to some one who had come again.

A cold chill ran over Wilton's body and bitterness choked him. His grip tightened on the handle of the axe. This was an old and an out-moded weapon; yet he had no other, and in times past it had served his family well. He lifted it sud-

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denly to his shoulder and was unaware of its great weight. Stepping swiftly to the door, he opened it.

The hall was silent and dark. Wilton strained his ears for some sound but could hear nothing. He stepped from the room, moved along the hallway to the right and came to a flight of stairs leading to the floor below.

He turned down them, came to the wide dining hall, and toward the rear of the room he saw a crack of light showing under a doorway. As he approached that door he could hear the murmur of voices; and then, loud and distinct and in English, he heard someone speaking.

"But he has not turned back. Most of his men are now on transports moving down the river from Cap Rouge. He plans to land them at the Anse du Foulon, to ascend the cliff. Unless Montcalm moves swiftly, by dawn the English army will be out there on the Plains of Abraham."

"Impossible," came an answer. "Bougainville guards the cliff."

"With but a handful of men. I know what I am talking about. The English are coming."

"We have had word that an attack is to be made tonight below the city."

"That will be but a feint," said the English voice. "It is to fool Montcalm. The main English army plans to scale the cliff by the path from the Anse du Foulon. Have I ever been wrong? Was I not right in warning you of the attack on Beauport?"

Andrew Wilton moistened his lips. He needed to hear no more. Such a plan had all the markings of the genius of the English leader. He didn't doubt that the traitor beyond the doorway had spoken the truth. He stepped quietly forward, twisted the knob of the door, pulled it open and moved into the room.

VI

IT WAS a small room which he had entered, one which might customarily have been used for private games of chance. In the middle of the room was a table and around it were several chairs. A candelabrum hung over the table and its lighted tapers flickered in the draft made by the opening of the door.

There were six people in the room—five men and the girl Marie. One of the men was quite old, red of face, gray-bearded: Wilton guessed at once that he was the Seigneur de Cournal. Three of the others were young French officers.

The fifth man's back was to Wilton and he didn't at once turn around.

Andrew Wilton kicked the door shut behind him. He saw Marie's eyes go to his face, saw all the color drain from her cheeks. The old man stiffened, looked swiftly at the girl and then looked at him. The three French officers dropped their hands to their swords, one of them half drawing his blade from its scabbard.

"So far as you in this room are concerned," Wilton said bluntly, "the English are already here. Turn around, Hardy. We have a score to settle."

The man whose back was to Wilton swung suddenly around and Wilton caught his breath. The informer was not Captain Hardy. There, facing him, a tight, strained expression on his face, was Colonel Stanhope.

"You!" Wilton gasped.

Stanhope looked from side to side. The assurance of aid must have given him courage, for a faint smile showed at his lips. "Yes, Wilton," he answered.

"But I saw Hardy here—in French uniform. He—"

"He had perhaps the same thought that you did," Stanhope answered. "He came here for information but was taken by the French and was executed."

Wilton remembered, then, the strange look Hardy had thrown at him over his shoulder as those French officers had accompanied him toward the back door. At that moment he must have guessed that his disguise had been penetrated; yet he had made no signal for help.

And Wilton recalled another thing. It was Stanhope's statement with regard to

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the word of a dying French spy which had done as much as anything else to convict John Wilton of treason. This man's work and his lies were responsible for the death of his brother.

Stanhope moved back a pace, pushing the table behind him. His hand dropped to his sword at his side. "We are too many for you, Wilton. Move away from that door."

Wilton shook his head but made no other answer. The three Frenchmen drew their blades, moved up to Stanhope's side. The Seigneur de Cournal backed across the room, biting his lips nervously.

"Andrew," Wilton heard the girl whispering. "Andrew—no. They will kill you."

Wilton looked at the girl and a bitter, mocking smile came to his lips. "And would you not like that, Madamoiselle Lucie de Cournal?" he asked flatly.

The girl twisted her hands together. "It is true that I am Lucie de Cournal, Andrew, but I—"

"It was to see you that my brother came here. Had it not been for that he would be alive today."

"I did not want him to come."

"You say that when your main business here is to serve as a station for spies, to learn what you can and carry word of it to Montcalm?"

The girl straightened and a hint of pride showed in her face. "After all, I am a French woman, Andrew Wilton. I serve my country even as you serve yours. And tonight I will ride again to General Montcalm's camp with word of Wolfe's plan. You cannot stop me."

WILTON swung the axe from his shoulder. The two red jewels in its head caught light from the flame of the candles. Again a brief smile came to Wilton's lips. The axe had a familiar feeling to his hands though he had never swung it before. It didn't seem so heavy as he had thought it.

"Away from that door," shouted one of the Frenchmen, rushing forward.

The axe in Wilton's hand swung up to parry the stabbing sword, caught it and turned it away, slashed down and caught the Frenchman in the side. The man screamed and staggered away, his hands clutching at the wound.

And now the other two officers and Colonel Stanhope surged forward, and back of them came the Seigneur de Cournal. Their blades whipped in and out like streaks of light as they feinted, lunged, slashed and then jerked away.

There was a grim, tight expression on Andrew Wilton's face. He met that attack stubbornly, desperately, swinging the great axe from side to side.

He had no hope during the first moment of that fight that he could stand against four others with so clumsy a weapon as an ancient battle-axe. Yet in that early attack not a sword reached him; and it seemed, suddenly, as if *Bretwalda* were as light and as easily handled as a rapier.

A strength, equal to its weight, had come into his arms. That was in line with one of the old legends of the axe he now recalled. The strength to swing *Bretwalda,* so the story went, came not from a man's muscles but from the axe itself.

Such a notion was absurd, Wilton knew; yet absurd or not it seemed true. The axe whipped up and blocked a slashing cut from one of the Frenchmen; it jerked down and turned aside the blade of Colonel Stanhope.

And then quite abruptly, with a shout which rose involuntarily to his lips—perhaps an echo of a shout uttered by one of his armored ancestors, centuries before —Andrew Wilton rushed to an attack.

The great axe sweeping out from one side to another sheared through the arm of one of the French officers and deep into his chest. It smashed against the head of another.

A chair whirling through the air from the hands of the Seigneur de Cournal sent Wilton to his knees, clouded his mind. He felt a stabbing pain in his shoulder, saw Stanhope jerking back his sword for another thrust.

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He lunged to his feet. *Bretwalda* rose in the air above Stanhope, then crushed through the man's skull as the traitor's last, despairing cry rang through the room.

And then again a chair flung by De Cournal tumbled Wilton to the floor. He got to his knees, leaned forward and cut at the man with the axe. De Cournal went down.

AS SWIFTLY as that was the fight over. Still on his knees, Wilton leaned against the axe. He lifted one hand to his face, wiped it across his eyes. Over against the wall, the girl was staring at him.

He said, "Marie—Marie—" And then he remembered that that wasn't her name, that the girl was Lucie de Cournal. He saw her turn toward the door, reach for the knob.

"Where are you going?" he heard himself asking, and his voice sounded so strange that he hardly recognized it as his own.

Lucie de Cournal turned to face him. "I'm going to General Montcalm. I'm going to tell him that the English are coming. What did you expect?"

Wilton tried to get up but there was no strength left in his legs. He shouted, "No, Marie! No! Get away from that door!"

The girl twisted the knob, pulled the door open. "I am going, Andrew Wilton, but first I want to repeat this. I had nothing to do with what happened to your brother. I want you to believe that."

Wilton stared at the girl. Within a few hours, he knew, Wolfe's soldiers would be landing at the Anse du Foulon, would be starting up the cliff.

If Montcalm knew that such was Wolfe's plan he could move his men to the head of the path up the cliff. A single regiment there could hold off the entire English army.

If this girl left here, reached Montcalm, the English cause was lost, the fight in this room would count for nothing.

"Wait, Marie! Wait!" he called desperately.

The girl shook her head. She was standing now in the doorway. "I am a French woman, Andrew," she said proudly. "Though you stood here with your axe I would still try to pass."

Wilton's grip tightened on the handle of the axe. He made one more effort to get to his feet, thinking that he might catch her, that he might be able to stop her that way. But he still could not get up.

The girl turned, started away. Wilton lifted the axe. He drew one long, shuddering breath, and then he hurled it at the girl. Candle light glistened on *Bretwalda's* steel as the axe whirled through the air.

It struck the girl in the shoulder. Wilton heard her piteous cry. He saw her fall and then he leaned forward and buried his face in his hands.

WITH the turning of the tide at two o'clock in the morning of September thirteenth, 1759, the English transport ships started down the St. Lawrence river from a point across from Cap Rouge.

Twice did sentinels on the cliffs challenge them; but the night was dark and a convoy of food was expected, and clever answers lulled the guards' suspicions.

At the Anse du Foulon, some day to be called Wolfe's Cove, the ships put in to the shore. An advance party hurried over the path up the cliff, surprised the small detail stationed at its head, and opened the way for others.

Ship after ship discharged its men and throughout the early hours of the morning, Wolfe's army assembled on the Plains of Abraham, a high plateau west of the walled city.

Word of their coming reached Montcalm, the French general, first as a rumor. He couldn't believe it possible. In the early dawn he left his camp at Beauport and rode toward the city.

From the bridge across the St. Charles he could see them, a long scarlet line atop the plain. It is said of him that he rubbed his eyes and still didn't believe it possible that all of that scarlet represented the English army.

But whatever he thought he was not

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long in determining a plan of action and messengers were sent at once to bring up the French army from Beauport.

From the window of Marie's room, or rather of Lucie de Cournal's room, Andrew Wilton watched the gathering of the two opposing forces. Now and then he glanced at the bed where the girl lay.

She still lived, but by what miracle he did not know. The crude bandage which he had fixed to her shoulder had finally stopped the bleeding of her wound; but it had bled for so long that he knew she could not have much strength left.

He had little memory of how he had brought her here, of the struggle up the stairs. All that had gone before was hopelessly confused in his thinking.

This manor house of the Seigneur de Cournal's was located at the north of the broad plain on which the two armies were forming. A little to the right were the English in their scarlet coats. To the left were the French, uniformed in blue, reinforced by a company of *coureurs de bois* and a good many Indian allies.

Here and there along the English line Wilton could make out regimental banners. He saw his own and wished that he had the strength to join those men he had drilled for so long. He saw Ashurts' banner, Monckton's, the banner of the Royal American regiment.

And opposed to them were famous regiments from France—the La Sarre, Languedoc, Royal Rousillon and Berne.

AND now, suddenly, the French line started forward. As they moved nearer to the English it seemed to Wilton that there were at least three blue-coated figures for every man in scarlet. They came on steadily to the sound of rumbling drums.

"It's started, Marie. It's started," Wilton called. There was a tightness in his throat and he was breathing faster with an excitement he couldn't control.

No answer, no sign came from the figure in the bed. Wilton glanced toward her and then again looked out of the window.

The French suddenly started firing but there was no response from the English line. The English soldiers stood rigid, motionless, their muskets shouldered as if they were on parade. The French fire increased; and here and there the English soldiers in the front rank fell to the ground. Others from the rear quietly stepped forward to take the places of those who had dropped.

Nearer and nearer drew the French, shouting now as they came, fumbling to reload their guns, firing them again. Up and down the English line moved the officers, giving no word of command, seemingly unmindful of the rain of shot. With them was General Wolfe, his wrist already shattered by a ball, his face very pale, his eyes calm.

Wilton's hands were gripped so tightly that his fingernails dug into his palms.

Never, he thought, had there been such a test of courage as this. Never before had men stood so boldly in the face of death and awaited word to strike back.

But back of that stubborn courage lay all of the hours and days of drill and all of the discipline so strictly enforced by General Wolfe. It counted now. It held that English line steady.

Not more than thirty yards now separated the two forces. Suddenly above the rattle of the French guns came an English command. Those shouldered muskets came down, were leveled. Another command rang out and a sheet of flame burst from the scarlet-clad line.

The French wavered, were hurled back. Never before in the history of gunpowder had a more devastating or a more effective volley been fired.

Again an English command rang out. Muskets were reloaded, primed, leveled once more. Another order and a second volley tore into the wavering line of Frenchmen, a volley almost as deadly as the first. And now the English started to advance with the same orderly precision as if going through maneuvers on the parade grounds.

It was too much for that shattered rem-

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nant of an army which had charged forth so confidently. They broke and fled.

And on the battlefield, the slender, pale-faced English general who had accomplished the impossible, who at the head of his men had been shot through the chest and groin, leaned back in the arms of one of his men, and assured of victory, whispered, "God be praised. I now die in peace."

ANDREW WILTON had seen the rout of the French army from the window. He saw the English set out in pursuit. For a time he watched them as they advanced on the city; then finally he turned away and moved back to the bed.

"Is it all over?" asked a voice.

Wilton stiffened, lifted his glance to the girl's face. Her eyes were open and a flush of fever had come into her cheeks.

"Marie," he whispered. "Marie."

"Is it all over?" asked the girl again.

"It is all over," he answered.

"Wolfe has—taken the city?"

"The way is open."

The girl's eyes closed and a faint sigh escaped from her lips.

"Marie," Wilton said again. "Marie." And then remembering, "Lucie. Lucie—"

"Yes—Andrew."

"I—I didn't mean—that is—I had to do what I did. I would much rather it had been me."

"You had to do what you did—and I—I had to do what I did. There was no other path for either of us."

The girl's voice was very low. He could hardly distinguish her words. But dropping to his knees at the side of the bed he reached for her hand and said quietly, "That is all ended now, Lucie. We will work things out together."

It seemed to him that there was an answering pressure from the girl's hand and his mind raced ahead to the future.

His own status still had to be cleared up but he thought there would be little difficulty about that. Colonel Stanhope's body in a French uniform in that room below should serve to clear not only himself but the record of his brother.

And with the fall of Quebec there would be an end to the war here in the new world. Canada as well as the American colonies would become English.

"We'll work things out together," he said again, and he felt very sure of himself.

MR. WRIGHT FOUND OUT HE WAS WRONG!
MR. WRIGHT: Gee, this stuff is awful! Why do all laxatives taste so bad?
MRS. WRIGHT: All of them don't. Ex-Lax tastes like delicious chocolate.
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MRS. W.: No, you don't! Ex-Lax is just as effective as any bad-tasting cathartic.
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MR. W.: I sure am glad I took your advice. It's Ex-Lax for me from now on.
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The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle!* No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative. It's good for *every* member of the family.
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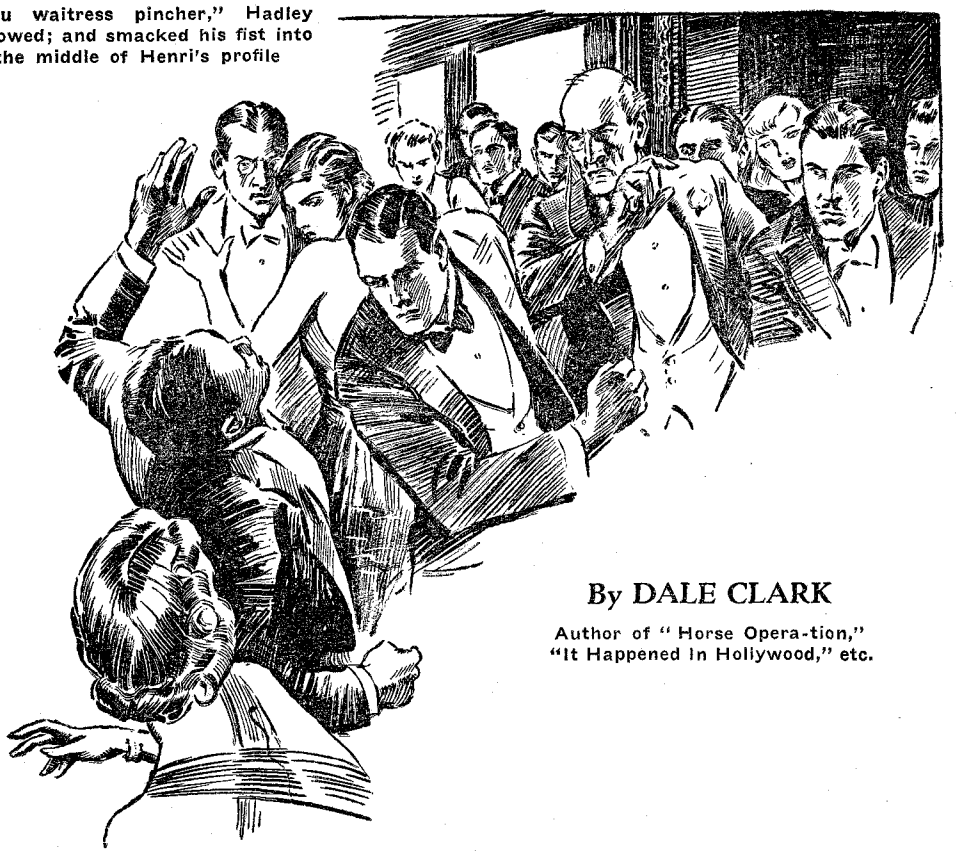

"You waitress pincher," Hadley bellowed; and smacked his fist into the middle of Henri's profile

By DALE CLARK

Author of "Horse Opera-tion," "It Happened In Hollywood," etc.

Heir Transparent

Scallions and old Liederkranz for our not too highly regarded friend J. Edwin Bell, vulture-puss of the Hollywood flesh marts

"GET out of my office, you light-fingered tramp!" J. Edwin Bell uttered harshly, while the eye behind his monocle grew glacially cold. "I ain't wasting my time on has-been ex-clowns which I couldn't get a job on a bet!"

Lippy Schmaltz cringed.

"Wait before you turn me out, Bell," he pleaded. "Wait, and listen how it's gonna rain dollars from heaven on both of us—on account of this idea I got!"

Mr. Bell sniffed.

Besides the monocle, he wore expensive garments of imported tailoring and had a gardenia in his lapel; so that from his stooped shoulders on down he presented the appearance of a London fashion plate. His appearance from the shoulders up wasn't so good, since this upper view naturally included J. Edwin's face.

Perched atop his skinny and outthrust neck, his sharply beaked features closely resembled those of a bird of prey—such as a large, bald vulture. In fact, what Mr. Bell really looked like was a fugitive from a taxidermist's shop.

"I'm listening," he stated glumly, "and all I hear is a dull clinking noise. Meaning them dollars must be counterfeit if you got anything to do with it!"

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Lippy Schmaltz grinned wisely.

"You think so?" he jeered. "Maybe you ain't hearing so good on account of them dollars being in Gus Lennox's pants pocket right now!"

"Lennox!" J. Edwin Bell perked bolt upright behind his office desk. Incredulous sounds blurted from his thin lips. "Did I hear you say Gus Lennox?"

"I dunno what you hearn," grunted Lippy, "but that's the name I said. In other words, Bell, I'm giving you a chance to scrape a little rich gravy off'n the Mogul Films Corporation's dinner plate!"

"Great shivering snakes!" breathed Mr. Bell. He was a Hollywood flesh peddler —a cinema agent—a one-man employment agency supplying assorted talent to the movie studios on a ten percent commission basis. That is, he worked for ten percent when he couldn't put the bite on somebody for more.

Gus Lennox, being the boss producer at Mogul, was a natural target for the bite. And the flesh peddler had tried—only so far, the net results amounted to severe pains shooting through the region of J. Edwin's dentistry.

But Mr. Bell was very, very willing to try again. Maybe this time he would really shake the large lettuce out of his ancient enemy's bankroll.

"Go on, Lippy!" he urged. "What's the proposition?"

"Simple," stated Lippy. "I'd do it myself, only I couldn't hardly get in Lennox's office to see him."

The flesh peddler nodded understandingly, for he knew all about Lippy's career —which was that of a professional ribber, or gag man. For Nature had lavished peculiar treasures on Mr. Schmaltz, including a rare ability to get anybody else's goat.

It explained the guy's career as a party entertainer in Hollywood, where nowadays the thoughtful host hardly ever fails to provide a hearty horse-laugh for his guests.

Lippy got the laughs. He got them by posing as a waiter, spilling cocktails on people, criticising the ladies' gowns, and getting into almost-fights with the men. For, as everyone in Hollywood knows, the highest form of humor is that of just insulting the daylights out of everybody in sight.

ONLY Lippy was no longer in demand as the hired life of the party. He wasn't, because he had a weakness for the cash in the guest's pockets, men's gold watches, and ladies' bracelets. In addition, he also stole the host's silverware.

It was only partly true that Mr. Schmaltz couldn't get into Gus Lennox's office. In full truth, he couldn't even get within pistol shot of the cop at the Mogul gate.

J. Edwin Bell knew all about this, since he had handled the gagman's professional career. "Meaning," he suggested, "you want to cut me in for fifty percent if I go see Lennox for you?"

"Ten percent," corrected Lippy. "Because all you gotta do is strictly legal."

"Legal?" puzzled the flesh peddler. "You mean you can get money away from Gus Lennox *legally?*"

"Why not?" asked Lippy. "Ain't you seen in the papers where old Ebenezer Hadley kicked the bucket? And also how his only son got trun by a polo goat and busted his neck?"

Mr. Bell had read both items. Old Ebenzer Hadley had been the big-shot banker behind the Mogul Films Corporation—owning, if J. Edwin remembered accurately, three-quarters of the voting stock. Compared to which, even the mighty Gus Lennox was only just a glorified office boy!

"Okey-dokey!" continued Mr. Schmaltz. "So all that dough goes to a second cousin, name of Mark Hadley. Only they can't find him to tell the news about how he hit the jackpot! And it leaves Gus Lennox trying to run a million-dollar business without a guy to sign the checks. So he puts up a ten grand reward for anybody which can find Mark Hadley.

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And that's just where we come in at!"

J. Edwin Bell leaned back in his chair, unmerry laughter rattling in his scrawny throat.

"Why, you cheap crook!" said Mr. Bell unpleasantly. "Sure, I heard all that. And more. I heard they got this guy Hadley's fingerprints from off a postal savings account he had in New York! Meaning your racket won't lead you nowhere except straight to jail!"

Lippy stared. "What racket?"

"Your phony." J. Edwin shrugged. 'The ringer you was going to slip over on Gus Lennox. Ain't that the idea?"

The party gagman drew a deep breath.

"Nah!" he exploded. "I don't need no phony. Because I found the real Mark Hadley—right here in Hollywood."

These words yanked J. Edwin half out of his chair. "What?" he yelped in astonishment. "You—say, what makes you so sure it's the real Hadley?"

Lippy grinned. "I knowed him ever since collitch days," he announced blandly.

"College?" choked the flesh peddler. "Why, you never even set foot inside of a college."

"Nah-h. But I been in Sing Sing," the gagman explained. "I was even on the football team there—and we took them collitch guys on for a practice game. So me and Mr. Mark Hadley was pushing each other around all afternoon!"

J EDWIN BELL focused his monocle on the professional insulter. "But that was several years ago, at least," he muttered doubtfully. "Chances are you just seen some guy that looks kinda like Hadley."

"I didn't only get a gander at him; I lifted his leather besides. Here!" Lippy tossed a limp billfold toward the desk.

Mr. Bell's thin fingers intercepted the wallet's flight. Automatically, his stare consulted the money compartments first. These being empty, J. Edwin turned his attention to the identification card and thumb-printed and signed driver's license from an eastern state.

Signed by Mark Hadley! There was something else: J. Edwin's alert glance detected a thin edge of blue cardboard tucked behind the license.

"Caesar's galloping ghost!" gulped the cinema agent, using the tip of his fingernail to pry up the license and discover a parking lot ticket underneath. "You mean the guy don't know he just hit a million-dollar jackpot? Walking around without a dime in his pants?"

Lippy sniffed. "He had fifty bucks on him—but you don't get no percentage on that!"

J. Edwin Bell wasn't interested in ten percent of a measly fifty dollars—at least, not very interested. "Where," he asked innocently, "is the guy living?"

The curl of Mr. Schmaltz's rubbery lips revealed yellowed teeth in a defensive grimace.

"Nah-h!" he objected warily. "I ain't spilling that! I know you, Bell! You'd keep that ten grand to yourself if you had half a chance!"

J. Edwin shrugged. He really hadn't expected the ex-extra to be quite that dumb, of course. He just asked to make sure Lippy didn't suspect the existence of the parking ticket.

"Suit yourself," he said; "only how am I supposed to collect the reward if I can't tell Lennox where the guy is?"

"You ain't gonna collect it!" asserted Lippy Schmaltz grimly. "You're gonna show Gus Lennox the leather, and make a date for me to settle the rest with him!"

"Okay, you win," Mr. Bell answered in a voice of false vinegar. "I'll go and see Gus right away immediately!"

Clutching the wallet in one fist, he clapped a derby hat atop his narrow skull with the other hand, and went rapidly into the street.

"Cabbie!" he bawled.

A taxi drew in to the curb. "Where to, mister?"

"Wait a minute!" cried J. Edwin, his fingers trembling in avid haste as he extracted the blue pasteboard from Mark Hadley's wallet. "Yeah! Let me off at

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the Emscott Hotel parking lot. And step on it, Jehu!"

THE flesh peddler's thin lips wore a predatory grin as the hack whirled him across Hollywood. That parking ticket was going to lead him straight to Mark Hadley, wasn't it? The knowledge of it sent Mr. Bell's pulse pleasantly hammering—and sent his crafty brain into a series of mental acrobatics.

For, to tell the truth, the flesh peddler did not always conduct his affairs on the up-and-up. Indeed, the main difference between J. Edwin Bell and Captain Kidd was that Mr. Bell neglected to fly the skull and crossbones. His flag was a field of yellow emblazoned with a staring black double-cross.

"I found this billfold," mused the cuticle vendor. "And if Lippy wants to deny it, he's laying himself wide open to a pickpocket rap! Or in other words, I don't have to split with the guy. Lippy's a dirty crook, anyway! Look at all the stuff he heisted at them parties after I got him them jobs.

"And—" here Mr. Bell's eye stabbed a savage gleam through its monocle, "he never cut me in for my ten percent of the take, like any honest man would have done!"

Whereupon, he dismissed Lippy Schmaltz with a shrug of his excellently tailored, stooped shoulders. He had more important things to think about, anyway. Such as this Mark Hadley guy!

Because Mark Hadley owned Mogul Films whether he knew it or not. And all Mr. Bell had to do was figure out ways and means of cashing in on this human gold mine.

"Ten thousand! I should be a sap and turn him over to Gus Lennox for a mere ten grand," muttered the flesh broker. "Why it's like being handed a blank check on the whole Mogul bankroll. I can fill it out for a million if I work this right."

Old Ebenezer Hadley had been president of the Mogul organization, he reflected. And they didn't pay off movie presidents with cigar coupons. Maybe they wouldn't make Mark Hadley president right away—not for a year or so—but they'd have to make him a vice-president at least. At about a hundred grand per annum!

"Hot dog!" Mr. Bell addressed himself earnestly. "So all I gotta do is sign him up on a exclusive long-term ironclad contract, entitling me to ten percent agency commission on his salary. Only first it means I gotta get the guy to trusting me. Which handing him back his empty poke ain't going to help any!"

So thinking, Mr. Bell reached for his own wallet. Fifty dollars, Lippy had said—and J. Edwin's beaky features contorted in physical anguish as he subtracted five ten-spots from his billfold. With the expression on his face of a guy being forcibly separated from his own five fingernails.

For Mr. Bell wasn't exactly generous when it came to handing out cash. He let loose of a dime when one turned around and bit him; but hardly ever otherwise. . . .

"WHY yes, that's my wallet. I must have dropped it somewhere," said the young man in the lobby of the Emscott Hotel. "No—hold on! This isn't my money. I had a twenty-dollar bill, and some fives. . . ."

He lifted a blackly curly head, stared at J. Edwin Bell with puzzled gray eyes.

"How come?" he demanded.

The flesh broker's agile wits cleared this hurdle with a flying leap. He chortled, "That proves it's yours. Because I took out your money and put in the same amount of my own."

"You—why?"

"So's you'd notice the difference if you really owned that poke," the tall cinema agent answered blandly. "That's how I could tell if I gave the wallet back to the right guy, see? On account there's dishonest fellas in Hollywood—even some lowdown crooks which would claim they lost your purse with my money in it!"

Mark Hadley blinked surprisedly.

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"Well, anyway, you're honest. You must be, or you wouldn't go to all that trouble to return a perfect stranger's billfold to him. And I'd like to reward you for it. Only—" he hesitated, gazing doubtfully at the costly cut of Mr. Bell's Bond Street attire— "I guess you wouldn't take a reward, would you?"

J. Edwin Bell forced a laugh. "Of course not! Certainly not! I couldn't accept a penny from you! But—"

He paused, beaming on the youth with the fond glance of a hawk admiring a day-old chick.

"Well?" young Hadley asked eagerly.

"I'll let you take me to lunch," consented Mr. Bell. "Only not today I couldn't, being on my way out to the Mogul Films lot. That is, unless you want to join me for a bite in the studio restaurant out there?"

As if anyone wouldn't jump at the chance of eating in a studio restaurant, along with real flesh-and-blood movie stars and directors!

Young Hadley's eyes bulged. "You mean, you can actually get inside the Mogul gate?"

"Sure," shrugged Mr. Bell. "I got a permanent pass, on account of I'm the highest top-notch talent agent in Hollywood."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the youth. "And I've spent a week trying to figure out a way of crashing into that place."

Choked sound struggled upward in the cuticle vendor's scrawny throat. "Crashing in?" he echoed. "You mean, you don't know anybody—any friends or relatives —that could get you a visitor's pass?"

"Not a soul," sighed the grey-eyed young man.

J. Edwin's heart bounced as high as the gardenia in his buttonhole. Why, this movie-struck kid didn't even know he was Ebenezer Hadley's kin!

"So all I gotta do is get him out there," thought the flesh peddler, "and feed him a dose of movie glamour. After which he signs on the dotted line while he's still in a daze!"

SHORTLY thereafter, the tall young man and the monocled flesh peddler steered their way across the crowded studio restaurant. Or rather, J. Edwin Bell steered the way—aiming straight toward the table Director Leon Hugo was just leaving.

"But," protested Mark Hadley, "this table isn't cleared yet."

"Never mind; it's gonna be," Mr. Bell stated, easing his lank length into the chair vacated by the director. "Look! Over in that corner is Henri Brei, the singing star Gus Lennox imported all the way from Paris."

Mark Hadley turned his head to look, and Mr. Bell's skinny fingers surrounded the dollar tip which Leon Hugo had left for the waitress.

Even when gunning for big game, Mr. Bell was not the guy to pass up any easy pot-shots along the way; and in the course of a year, J. Edwin picked up considerable velvet by knocking over tips on uncleared restaurant tables.

"Hey!" blurted young Hadley, jerking around wrathfully. "That's a dirty trick to play on a working girl, ain't it?"

J. Edwin Bell's fist froze in the act of transferring the coin to his pocket. "Huh?" he gulped, his sallow cheeks taking on the guilty tint of a Technicolored sunrise. "Why, you was looking the other way!"

"I was looking straight at Henri Brei!" snapped Hadley. "He pinched that blond waitress as she went by."

He stopped as the blond girl began clearing off their table. "Look, sister, what's your name?"

"Valerie. Jean Valerie." Her young face was almost as pink as Mr. Bell's. "What of it?"

"Nothing," said Hadley. "Except you just say the word, Miss Valerie, and I'll go knock that musical frog for a double loop into the nearest garbage can!"

"Oh, no. Please!" Miss Jean Valerie's blue eyes were imploring. "I'd lose my job! Why, Henri Brei is the most temperamental star on the lot."

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"Oh, yeah?" Mark Hadley scowled. "That don't give him any right to pinch you, does it?"

J. Edwin Bell grunted. "Never mind! It don't mean a thing when a Frenchman pinches a girl there. They do it for flattery, like an American lifts his hat to a dame. . . . Just bring us two ham on ryes and a couple slugs of Java, girlie."

Miss Jean Valerie went away with an armload of dishes, and Mark Hadley stared thoughtfully at Mr. Bell.

"So that's what's going on around here," the young man muttered. "Big shots making passes at working girls, and the girls being insulted for fear of losing their jobs! I read plenty about Hollywood, and I'm beginning to guess a guy could find out plenty by just laying low and keeping his mouth shut."

A cold thrill teased its way along J. Edwin Bell's spine. Sudden suspicions played tag through the labyrinthine paths of his wily brain.

"Laying low?" he echoed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean there's probably plenty of stuff being pulled right here on the Mogul lot," asserted Hadley. "Yes-men collecting big salaries for doing nothing, and casting directors giving jobs to their friends, and money being wasted left and right. I mean all that stuff you hear is probably strictly true."

He tackled the sandwich Miss Valerie put before him; said, "I bet she could tell plenty if she wasn't afraid of getting fired! Only of course Gus Lennox wouldn't ever ask her. A big shot like him can't get away from the brass band long enough to do a little private investigating." Hadley paused long enough to snort. "It's like fixing a car. A guy has to get down on the ground and look up under the motor. He can't find out anything by riding around in the back seat while a chauffeur does the driving."

NEVER slow on the uptake, J. Edwin Bell had got the idea already a minute ago. Mark Hadley wasn't so dumb, after all. He knew whose second cousin he was! Sure, he did! And he knew who owned three-fourths of the Mogul voting stock, too.

So that was why he had kept his presence in Hollywood a secret—because he wanted to find out for himself what went on behind the scenes.

Mr. Bell's piratical mind instantly set his sails with the prevailing wind.

"You're absolutely right!" he said. "A smartie could get plenty of low-down, supposing for example he had a job as an extra. Which I'm in the business of handling such jobs for a mere ten percent. Here."

He whipped a document from his pocket, uncapped his pen. "Lemme sign you up," wheedled J. Edwin. "I won't promise you no fat salary, but I'll get you some kind of a movie connection where you can get enough experience to write a book about."

"Mr. Bell," cried Mark Hadley warmly, "it's the break I've been looking for."

He flourished his name across the dotted line.

"Hot dog! You're hook—I mean, you're almost hired already," explained the flesh broker in triumph as he returned the contract to his pocket. No matter what happened from now on, he was in—into Hadley's future earnings for a strictly legal ten percent.

So rejoiced J. Edwin Bell—with one half of his mind. The other half was busy figuring how he didn't have to stop just because he'd won a battle. There was a war to settle—his old war with Gus Lennox.

"Come on," he said. "I already thought of a swell job where you can meet the most important big shots in the industry."

They left hastily, almost colliding with director Leon Hugo in the doorway. Mr. Hugo's round face was an unhappy shade of gray as he propelled himself between the tables.

"Hey, Joan! Miss Valerie," he wailed. "I made a mistake. That was my lucky dollar I tipped you—and I want it back."

"Dollar?" cried the blond. "You tipped

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me a dollar? Why, that old vulture-puss—Why, he's gone!"

Mr. Bell was gone, all right—secluded in the first telephone booth he had sighted, and putting in a call to a newspaper guy of his acquaintance.

"Listen, Winkle," J. Edwin said swiftly. "How about trading me two ducats for the reception Gus Lennox is throwing in honor of Henri Brei's new flicker after the prevue tonight?"

"Trade you," came Winkle's reply, "for what?"

"A scoop," Mr. Bell promised. "I found the guy that owns Mogul Films, and you can have the first interview with him in return for them ducats."

"Sure. What can I lose, because with my dyspepsia the reception's gonna be a total loss anyway," agreed the newspaperman.

The flesh broker knifed his thin form out of the booth and grabbed Mark Hadley's arm enthusiastically. "That was Gus Lennox I talked to about you," he reported, "and it's all set provided you got a dress suit."

"You mean monkey clothes? Gosh, I'm out of luck."

"Never mind," consoled Mr. Bell, planning rapidly as he spoke. The flesh peddler's ideas were always strictly Class A larceny, but this one was even better. In fact, it was super-colossal and epical, besides being a stroke of genius.

Elation flowed hotly in J. Edwin's veins as he contemplated it, and his vulture-like visage set in an anticipatory grin. "Never mind I'll rent you the glad rags."

IN A rented dress suit, therefore, Mark Hadley stood beside J. Edwin Bell that evening at the reception in honor of Henri Brei's latest picture.

"All set?" queried the flesh broker. "You ain't forgot what you're gonna say?"

Hadley's gray gaze rested glumly on the glamorous throng of motion picture celebrities in the ballroom. "Yeah, I know. But if you ask me, it's pretty damned silly!"

Mr. Bell shrugged his dinner-coated shoulders. "You wanted to get the low-down on Hollywood, didn't you? Well, there ain't hardly any Hollywood parties nowadays where they don't amuse the guest with some gags like this. It's got so pouring soup down people's necks is a way of making a living in this town."

"It's downright childish!" muttered young Hadley. "I'm surprised a fifty-thousand-dollar executive like Mr. Lennox would waste his money on such stunts."

"That's because you don't know Lennox yet," grinned the cuticle vendor, "or anyways not the way you're going to pretty soon!"

He seized the young man's arm, for at that moment Mr. Bell's monocled stare glimpsed Gus Lennox moving toward the champagne-sipping figure of Henri Brei. On account of being a little, bald, brown, shriveled guy, Gus Lennox inevitably reminded the onlooker of a peanut—but a peanut all dolled out in soup-and-fish, starched shirtfront, and diamond studs.

"Go ahead. Lennox is giving us the high-sign to spring the gag right now," said J. Edwin.

Because this was the flesh broker's super-colossal stroke of genius—employing Mark Hadley as Lennox's hired gagman without letting Lennox know about it.

"Okay. But I still think it's damned foolishness for grown-up men to pull this sort of horseplay!"

Hadley advanced, elbowing celebrities of both sexes aside as he bore down on Henri Brei. J. Edwin Bell tagged behind, like a buzzard hovering on the trial of an active young wolf in order to help the wolf finish his next meal.

Hollywood, reflected Mr. Bell pleasureably, was going to see something new in the way of high-powered, double-barreled, delayed-fuse gags tonight! In fact, Hollywood already was seeing it—and hearing it, for Mark Hadley had been instructed to speak his lines in a loud, clear voice.

"That prevue tonight," remarked the young man, "certainly was a stinker."

The ensuing dead silence was all that Mr. Bell had hoped for.

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"Comment?" gasped Henri Brei unbelievingly.

"And you," declared Mark Hadley, "were the worst smell in it."

Henri Brei strangled on an ejaculation in his native tongue, roughly translatable as, "Name of a pig!"

Hadley was not an expert ribber—not of Mr. Lippy Schmaltz's class—but what he lacked in finesse, he made up in grim determination.

"You sing through your nose," he continued, "and you got a crooked nose, besides."

IN THE moment which followed these tributes, Mr. Bell heard a sound effect which hadn't been included in the original script. Indeed, it surprised the flesh broker, even though he knew all about Monsieur Brei's temperamental pride in his voice and profile.

The sound effect was the *sloosh* of Henri's champagne flung full into young Hadley's face.

"Sapristi!" snarled the Frenchman. *"Espèce d' idiot!"*

Mark Hadley mopped champagne out of his eyebrows. "Why you—you waitress pincher!" he bellowed, and contributed a sound effect of his own.

Namely, the smack of his fist square into the middle of Henri Brei's profile.

"Hot dog!" breathed J. Edwin Bell, his monocled optic brightening as he beheld Gus Lennox arriving on the scene of battle.

Gus Lennox was far from being the biggest man in the room. But then, Vesuvius isn't the biggest mountain in the world. And Gus Lennox, like Vesuvius, could erupt on occasion—as now. . . .

"Bummer! Reprobater! Nose-smasher!" blazed the little producer, hurdling Henri Brei's prostrate figure to confront Mark Hadley. "Or if I don't make myself clear yet, you hoodlummer! You're gonna wind up in Alcatraz for this. Somebody call a cop."

"Wait a minute," protested J. Edwin Bell, knifing his thin figure through the ring of onlookers. "You mean you're actually going to have this boy arrested?"

Gus Lennox whirled.

"So!" he intoned dangerously. "It gives buzzards besides hoodlummers! Somebody call two cops!"

"Why, you two-timing peanut!" gasped the flesh peddler. Wounded innocence rang in his voice. "Trying to have us arrested when you hired this boy to pull off the gag for a joke!"

"Hired him?" bleated the producer. "Listen, ain't I already got troubles too much without I should go and hire nose-smashers so Brei can't make a personal appearances tour?"

J. Edwin Bell laughed hoarsely. "Yes, you hired him! You're just trying to back out of it, Gus Lennox, on account of this French ham didn't take it in a spirit of nice clean fun."

"A-ha!" cried Henri Brei, sitting up on the floor and glaring at Lennox. "So you have hire heem to make insult of me? *Mon Dieu.* I tear up my contrack! I go back to Paree!"

Wailing sound gathered in the little producer's throat.

"No!" he implored. "Listen to me, Brei! What's behind this is like always, meaning a snake in the grass named Bell! Commencing when he comes in, it gives buzzard feathers in the woodpile again! In other words, Bell is a wolf in sheep's clothing biting below the belt on Achilles' heel."

"So—now you call me the heel?" shrilled Henri Brei. "You make the insult, too. *Mon Dieu,* of a sureness I tear up my contrack."

At which point, another voice made itself heard. "Break it up, folks. Gangway. Who called the cops?"

"Officer," choked Gus Lennox. "Take these two crooks to the hoosegow—permanently."

IN THE eleven A.M. glare of a police court the next morning, J. Edwin Bell and young Hadley faced the judge on charges of disturbing the peace and resisting arrest.

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Mr. Bell was not quite his usual elegant self, because of the fact that a dinner coat, even of the most fashionable cut, is not improved by being used as a jail-house pillow. However, at least J. Edwin's garments were all on him—which was more than could be said for Mark Hadley.

It had taken three cops to insert Mark in the paddy-wagon last night, and his rented dress suit looked like the costume a shipwrecked sailor would have worn—if the sailor had also been recently clawed by a tiger.

"A pretty pair," commented the judge. "A hundred dollars apiece—or three months at hard labor."

Young Hadley turned to the flesh broker. "I've only got forty left. Could you—?"

Mr. Bell could. With a noticeable lack of enthusiasm he reached for his billfold. He emptied out one hundred and sixty bucks just as gladly as a prospector lost on the desert would empty his water canteen onto the thirsty sands.

"Come on. It's money well spent," cried young Hadley, "because anyway I found out what a rat Gus Lennox is. And I'm going to tell him so right now."

Curiously enough, the Mogul receptionist said that Gus Lennox was expecting them. And they should go right in.

Gus Lennox sat in his private office, the walls whereof were papered with gold leaf and equipped with stained glass windows like a cathedral. Since the producer's chair was a Balkan king's ex-throne, and his desk of teakwood inlaid with ivory, the general effect was of a peanut mistakenly exhibited in a jeweler's window.

But Gus Lennox wasn't really taken in by all this splendor. He just used it to dazzle other guys.

"Hello, Bell," greeted the little producer with a chuckle. "Have a cigar! Have two cigars!"

"Huh?" grunted young Hadley. "You changed your tune, didn't you?"

"Yeah," acknowledged Gus Lennox, smiling blandly. "On account it seems this latest Henri Brei production is strictly a turkey, with all the morning papers saying that prevue last night was the worst headache in years.

"Of course," he added hastily, "I never did like the guy, only he was box-office and you gotta give the public what it wants! But looks like I'm lucky he got so insulted he tore up his contract, so there ain't any hard feelings!"

"I see," muttered young Hadley. "That's why you hired me to spring that gag! In case his picture flopped?"

"Listen, do we got to start that all over from the beginning yet?" shrugged the little producer. "If I hired you or not makes no difference since I'm glad I got rid of Brei anyway."

"Yeah? Well, it makes a difference to me," Hadley yelled, "Lennox, you're fired!"

"I'm not going to argue—hey! What'd you say?" gasped the monarch of Mogul. "Bell, what looney house did you find this guy in?"

J. Edwin Bell chuckled unmerrily.

"He ain't looney, he's the heir to Ebenezer Hadley's dough. He's the second cousin you been looking for. And," grated the flesh broker, "you heard what he said. You're fired. On your way, peanut. Only first write me out a check for the ten grand reward, on account of I brung him here."

"JUST a minute, Mr. Bell," said Mark Hadley softly. "In the first place, I brought myself here. And in the second place, I've got a bigger reward than that planned for you. Now I've fired Lennox, I need an experienced man as producer—and you're it!"

J. Edwin Bell reeled, clutched the ivory-inlaid desk for support.

"You mean," he gasped, "if I don't claim that ten grand, you're gonna give me Lennox's job at fifty thousand bucks a year?"

"That's right," nodded the young man.

There was nothing wrong with J. Edwin Bell's arithmetic. Ten grand against fifty?

"Hot dog!" he exulted. "I mean, I accept."

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"Grass-snaker! Now it shows what's under the sheep's clothing last night." Gus Lennox wailed. "Only, hold on. It ain't proved yet this guy is who he claims to be."

Mark Hadley shrugged. "I can settle that in a hurry. You see, Lennox, you've got a young lawyer in the legal department who went to college with me. I'm going to bring him right over here, so we won't waste any time while my fingerprints are being checked."

He strode to the door, paused there. "Didn't I tell you, Mr. Bell, I wanted to reward your honesty in returning my wallet?" he asked, and went out.

"Honest! *You* honest?" Gus Lennox gasped. "Now I know why we couldn't find him before; because we didn't look in the looney-house he must be fresh out of."

A gloating chuckle bathed J. Edwin Bell's tonsils. "Nice office I got here, ain't it?" he inquired. "Take a good look around, Lennox, before you go. Take a last look at where you don't work any more—"

He checked as the door opened again, revealing a blond vision bearing a tray.

"The lunch you ordered, Mr. Lennox," began Miss Joan Valerie; and then her voice changed as she recognized the slightly stooped figure of the monocled flesh peddler. "Vulture-puss again!" she exclaimed. "How about that dollar tip you stole from me yesterday? Come on, give!"

Mr. Bell had the dollar in his pocket—for luck—but he wasn't giving.

"Get out!" he barked at the girl. "And stay out. You're fired."

Miss Valerie's blue eyes opened widely. "And just who," she demanded skeptically, "is firing me?"

"I am," asserted J. Edwin Bell. "And you ain't the only one, either. There's a lot of people around going to get their walking papers from me."

The girl whirled to Gus Lennox. "What in the world—?"

"He's right," admitted Lennox sadly. "It's like he says, we got a buzzard for an executive producer beginning five minutes ago."

Joan Valerie's resistance wilted abruptly. "But you can't fire me. Mr. Bell, I've got a mother to support—a sick mother—"

"It's no use, girlie." Gus Lennox shrugged. "A heart is what Bell ain't got."

And indeed, a grin of merriment was on Mr. Bell's beaky features as he watched the young woman stumble blindly from the gold-leafed office—*his* office.

"SWEET ziggety," the flesh broker breathed. "I'm just now beginning to appreciate this job. It ain't only revenge I got on you, Lennox—it's everybody on the lot that ever done me dirt. It's dames like Serina Howe, the Krunchy Korn gun moll, and Ruby Acres, and guys like Jim Sheridan and Tim Yorel, and that shoe-shine brat—"

Mr. Bell beamed enthusiastically. "I'm gonna tie a tin can on every one of 'em. I'll grind 'em under my heel. I'll stomp 'em in the dust. Let me at that phone so I can get 'em all over here quick."

J. Edwin's arm darted across the desk, and J. Edwin's talony fingers curled on the gold-plated instrument. Curled—and froze there. His agonized glance stabbed through the monocle to recognize Mark Hadley in the doorway—and also in the hands of a blue-garbed studio cop.

"W-what?" spluttered Mr. Bell.

Young Hadley cringed abjectly. "The game's up, pal," he said weakly. "I was doing fine until a newspaper guy outside waiting for an interview got a gander at me."

"Winkle!" muttered J. Edwin Bell.

"Yeah, that's the guy," said Hadley, shrugging with the shoulder which the cop wasn't hanging onto. "He tipped off the bull here, on account he recognized me for Louie the Lifter."

"What?" yelped Gus Lennox. "Meaning you ain't the right heir, after all?"

"Nah-h," said the downcast Hadley. "I was only bluffing so's to get a chance at lifting some stuff around here like that

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diamond-set ashtray on your desk, and the gold phone."

"Lippy!" groaned J. Edwin Bell, his sallow skin dotted with goose-pimples of cold realization. "Lippy Schmaltz framed this. And I give you fifty bucks, besides bailing you outa jail. Why, you dirty so-and-some-more!"

"Can that swearing," said Hadley. "You're gonna bail me out again—or sit in jail with me. Because you're in this just as deep as I am."

Snarled sound jarred from J. Edwin Bell's sourly drawn lips.

"You try and prove that," he challenged.

"It's easy," asserted Hadley. "You even made me sign a paper about splitting the swag with you—*hey, stop him!*"

IT WAS too late for anybody to stop J. Edwin Bell. Along with the lucky dollar, he had transferred the agency contract to his dinner clothes.

Moving with speed which would have photographed as a blur by a slow-motion camera, Mr. Bell's skinny fingers whipped around the document, ripped off the signed end of it, and crammed the foolscap into his mouth.

He swallowed it.

"Send for a stomach pump," shouted Gus Lennox. "Get a doctor—"

Young Hadley laughed.

"Never mind, Lennox," he advised. "You see, I never got as far as the legal department. I overheard that newspaper man telling the receptionist that J. Edwin Bell had promised him an interview with me—on the phone yesterday.

"So I turned back to ask Bell about that, and I met Joan Valerie coming out of the door crying, and it took her just two sentences to put me wise. She told me about the dollar, and about Bell firing her. So I ran and got the cop—"

A shudder travelled the entire length of J. Edwin's tallish figure. The eye behind his monocle registered a horrid suspicion.

"Huh?" he mumbled. "Then you really are Mark Hadley, after all?"

"Well," suggested the youth, "why else would I trick you into eating up that contract entitling you to ten percent of my income?"

"Great shivering snakes!"

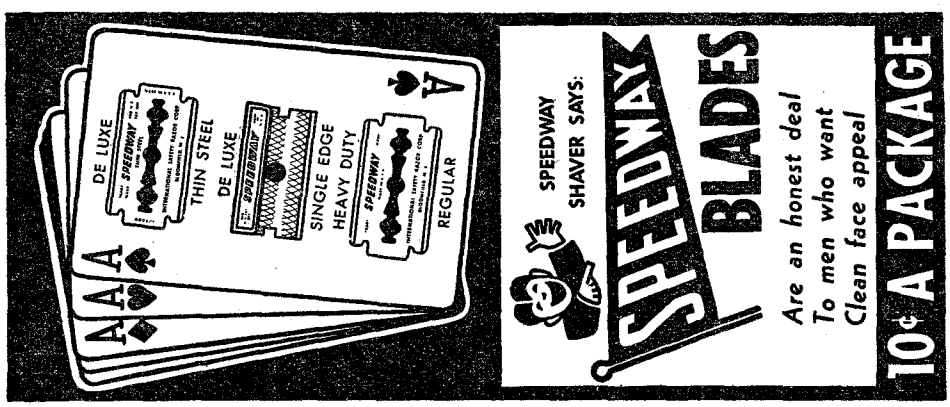
The contract was gone; J. Edwin Bell had refused the ten grand reward. Hit in his most sensitive spot—namely, his pocketbook—the flesh peddler crumpled weakly to the floor.

For just a moment, he lay in a dreamy condition.

Then the cop's form loomed hazily over him, and he became aware of Miss Joan Valerie holding a glass of water to his lips.

"Stand back, the rest of you," the cop urged. "Stand back and give the guy air."

Mr. Bell's teeth rattled against the water glass. "It looks—it looks like I got it," he gasped; and passed out cold again.



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The Devil's Diary

By WILLIAM DU BOIS

CHAPTER XXIX

SATURDAY: MIDNIGHT

NO one said anything for the next minute. I watched the Chief try hard to get mad, as Barnes held sheet after sheet up to the light. Of course, it had been a real risk to take with a local cop. But as I said before, I had a deadline hanging over me. Besides, I was feeling too miserable at the way things were closing in on Dr. Joe. I had to create a diversion, or go berserk.

"What do you make of it?" asked Willis. I knew I was safe, the minute he opened his mouth.

"What can anyone make out of a ream of blank copy paper, Chief?"

"Eddie seems to be working pretty hard to make something," said Willis, reaching for his cap. "As for me, I need fresh air. Want to look at that body now?"

So help me, Barnes was still studying each one of those blank pages separately when we went out. Daphne sat right where she was, mechanically stacking the sheets. I turned back from the doorway to apologize for the snatch, but she looked right through me, like someone who'd sat down to catch her breath after too much sleep-walking.

Everyone in the lobby tried to follow us when Willis picked up a flashlight, but two deputies stepped across the door one second after I'd trailed him. A car drove up as we started along the blue-flagged walk, and Kirby III jumped out, looking no more ruffled than usual.

"What terrible news, Chief Willis. I came as quickly as I could. If there's anything I can—"

"We'll see about that right away, Mr. Lake. Would you care to come along with us now?"

"I'm not too keen about it, unless you think it's necessary—"

But I had him by the hand already, and was leading him down that shortcut through the scrub, right on the Chief's heels. It gave me a certain satisfaction to note that the junior tycoon had a very damp palm indeed.

The first installment of this six-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for September 30

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IT WAS much too dark for conversation, once we got around the corner of that building. Moon or no moon, the scrub closed in on the path like a wall; even with the Chief's flashlight, we had to stay right on each other's heels to tell trail from palmetto. Then someone shoved a bull's-eye through the darkness ahead, and we came through a thicket of water-oaks and out on the last bend of the drive.

There was a rank, close growth of cabbage palms here, and the road was still dark. Walking back toward the Patio, and into the moonlight, was like walking out of a cave.

Two more of Willis' deputies had spread a tarpaulin over the body, and were standing by with lanterns—as I gathered from their opening remarks, still waiting for the coroner. I took a careful look this time, with Kirby III being sympathetic and faintly queasy beside me. A look which added nothing to what I already had, besides a little private nightmare.

Willis flicked his flashlight into the grass beside the road. "Here's the niblick, Jordan."

He picked the club up carefully in a handkerchief—a rather useless precaution, when you figured out the number of people that must have handled it after the lovely Anita went into her faint. It was a Number Nine iron, with the shaft snapped off short perhaps two feet above the head.

"Any idea where it came from, Chief?"

"Only that it's an expensive iron—must be one of a set."

"A matched set, you mean?" said Kirby.

"Signed by some pro," said Willis, putting the niblick beside the body. "Anything more you gentlemen would like to check on?"

"Heavens no," said Kirby. "Would you mind lowering that tarpaulin? Thank you so much."

"Perhaps we'd all be more comfortable, back in the manager's office," I said, tactfully.

Barnes was still holding sheets up to the light when that office door closed behind us. I patted Daphne's shoulder, just once, before I sat down at the desk and spread my notes. Kirby III had taken the Chief's chair instinctively. Believe it or not, he was presiding at a board meeting, in his mind, before I'd had a chance to open my mouth. Another half-minute, and I'm sure he'd have called us all to order.

"Now, gentlemen," said Kirby III, "if someone will enlighten me on the *facts* of this deplorable—"

I took it away from him, as firmly as I could without being rude. I don't think anyone could really be rude to Kirby III unless it was that fellow who threw the bomb at Morgan's bank. "Do you mind picking this up as we go along, Mr. Lake?" I said, gently. "I've already driven Chief Willis to the verge of neurosis, assembling my story."

That got me back in the driver's seat, all right. Kirby III sat down—this time, in a straight chair against the wall. I turned back to Willis.

"WE'VE been talking backward for an hour now, Chief; let's reverse the process. Do you know why Larry Ray rented Cedar Island day before yesterday? With that drawbridge and a tide-rip on both sides, he felt he was burglar-proof at last. Do you realize he's been in deadly fear of death, ever since Owen Carey was done for?

"When Ray gave me my interview this afternoon, he said he would name Carey's murderer in a diary he was sending north tonight, via Daphne Carter. You've seen how much information that briefcase contained. It's my contention that Ray had shot his bolt—that his statement was a grand bluff, pure but not simple.

"One thing is certain: Ray knew that it would be only a question of time before the thief who stole that first diary would trail him here. Any normal man, in a similar predicament, would have called on the police at once. But no one has ever accused Larry Ray of reacting normally to a situation. He may have been scared blue;

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he certainly looked blue to me this morning. Megalomania's stubborn pride, call it what you like, made him sit tight on his island and jitter, until he chanced on another way out—"

"Then why did he drop those hints to me?" asked Barnes.

"I'm coming to that Eddie—fast. Of course, Ray figured that the whole world suspected him of going into hiding here to rewrite his diary from memory.

"He decided to face that suspicion, and turn it to some use. That's why his first step was to give the local paper a do-re-mi about flying Daphne north with part of his new manuscript. He felt reasonably sure that his nemesis had reached Florida by now and was waiting for a chance to strike. Of course, the only thing the murderer feared worse than Ray was the ink from Ray's typewriter ribbon.

"Are you beginning to see my point? Ray felt sure the thief would read that story of Barnes', and swallow it whole. Ray also thought he'd be lurking tonight in the vicinity of that bay-side road, ready to nab Daphne when she set out for the landing field.

"Do you see now why Ray made poor Daphne stay on in the cottage, with every light burning, long after he'd rowed himself safely across the bay to keep that date with Old Joe?

"Unfortunately, Chief Willis, you took my report this afternoon seriously, and sent a couple of your boys to patrol that bay-side road. Maybe everything I've said so far is tripe, but I'll stake my job on this—that murderer knew his ground thoroughly, and he was very cautious. He smelled out that patrol somehow, before he turned in from the two-lane highway; and he kept on going—far enough up that main road to swing back toward town.

"Call it an accident if you like; I'll bet two jobs that he was on the Matanzas bridge when Ray drifted in to the Municipal Pier in that rowboat. Don't forget a full moon was shining. A person born on Times Square might think he was invisible, but—"

"In that case, why wasn't Ray killed in the boat?"

"Maybe the boat was too near civilization by that time. Maybe it was too long a shot for a niblick. . . . Anyhow, the murderer trailed Ray, until he got a real chance. Of course, Ray's supreme mistake was going out to the Patio. It gave his nemesis a brand new idea—to pin Ray's death on someone else. All he had to do was pick that club out of someone's bag, strike Ray down in the dark—"

"Only it happened on an open road, with the moon shining," said Willis, patiently but not too patiently.

"FAIR enough," I said. "Something's wrong with my timing all right. What about the timing of the people you've arrested? Suppose Old Joe, or his son, really clouted Ray. Wouldn't they have had sense enough to throw that club into the bushes, instead of dropping it close to the body?

"Wouldn't both Piccaris have run straight for that touring-car? Wouldn't they have let Pud shoot a few times over people's heads—and gotten away clean?"

"Is that all?" asked Barnes.

I looked hard at the Chief. But he was thinking now, and done with talking.

"Isn't it enough?" I asked, noticing that my voice rang flat in my own ears.

"I like the Chief's story better," said Barnes. "It doesn't take so long to tell, and it has more point."

"Jack's story has lots of point to me," said Daphne loyally.

"I don't aim to sound ungallant, Miss Carter, but you worked for the *Star* once yourself, didn't you?"

"It's only a contribution, Chief," I said. "Take it, or throw me out."

"Perhaps I should speak," said Kirby III.

He'd been sitting there so quietly—and taking in all that was said with such well-bred insouciance—that we had almost forgotten he was there at all. The Chief snapped his feet down from the desk in a rush. After all, this was his squire's son.

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"I was the—the host of this party," said Kirby III. "Naturally, I felt a certain obligation toward my guest of honor, Miss Claire Cummings. When I saw a—well, a fracas in the making, it seemed only decent to remove her quickly as possible."

"So you weren't here when the real trouble started?"

"Emphatically not. Miss Cummings was—not too well at the moment. It took a little time to arouse her maid, see her safely to her room. Of course I hurried back to the party at once, to do what I could. I hope that explains my absence to your complete satisfaction?"

"So far, you haven't explained anything," I said.

He noticed me, with those too-perfect manners. At the same time, I don't think I've ever been cut so beautifully in my life. "I have a little more to say to Chief Willis, Mr. Jordan," said Kirby III, "but that little is not for publication."

I saw that Daphne was already at the door waiting for me. I shook hands with Willis, and followed her. Barnes' chuckle stopped abruptly when the Chief thumbed him after us. With my head start, I'm glad to report that I beat him to the only phone-booth in that night club.

CHAPTER XXX

SUNDAY MORNING: 11:00

IT was almost eleven when I sat up in bed the next morning, fighting mad because they hadn't wakened me sooner. Then I saw Trudy in the armchair by the window, calmly reading the Florida *Times-Union.*

"Mr. Masters brought this when he drove down from Jacksonville," she said. "In case you don't know, he's North Florida correspondent for the *Star,* and a very nice boy."

"Why wasn't I wakened sooner?"

"Because I told the desk not to ring this room, darling."

"We went over that ground last night, Trudy, just before we turned in. You *know* I've got to—"

"Mr. Masters is handling everything at the court-house, dear. We both agreed you should be allowed to sleep until noon." She opened her purse, and took out a telegram. "This came from New York; I've been afraid to open the envelope."

"I don't blame you," I said. "It's from Mac."

Trudy looked over my shoulder as I read:

HEARTFELT THANKS FOR STORY STOP UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES AM SPIKING YOUR INTERVIEW WITH RAY STOP HAVE WIRED MASTERS GIVING YOU AUTHORITY THERE STOP CROWELL ARRIVING JACKSONVILLE THIS MORNING PLANE AND WILL TAKE OVER STOP HOPE YOU ENJOY YOUR VACATION MY BEST TO YOUR WIFE
MACDONALD

"Apparently Mac has a sense of humor after all," I said.

"What do you mean? Aren't you on vacation this very moment, if you want to be?"

I began to dress as fast as I could move. "After what happened last night?"

But Trudy was still studying the wire. "This says Mr. Crowell is coming to relieve you."

"That's what worries me. They must figure in New York that the story will peter out tomorrow—in other words, that the law has got its man."

"Miss Carter doesn't think so for a minute," said Trudy, "in fact, she had quite a cry into her oatmeal this morning."

"So you've had breakfast with Daphne?"

"Of course. I walked around to her rooming-house the first thing and brought her back with me. Somone had to cheer the poor girl up. She's down on the veranda now, reading the papers. If she can concentrate on facts for the next hour, she'll manage to keep away from that court-house—"

"Is Masters still there?"

"He expected to be there until noon, at least. They're deciding about bail for the Piccaris now."

"Any more arrests?"

"Not one," said Trudy, watching me knot my tie. "We *are* moving on right after lunch, aren't we, dear?"

"And leave the story hanging fire?"

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"But if Mr. Crowell's taking over—?"

"Who's taking over for Dr. Joe, and that old hellion you liked so much?"

"Darling, what can you do now? They'll surely be out on bail—and the case won't come up for a month, at least."

"Quite aside from that angle," I said severely, "don't forget the request Chief Willis made to every person at that party."

"It was only a request—not a command."

"Just the same, it would look mighty odd if anyone should leave town today, before the enquiry is one-hundred per-cent complete." I patted Trudy's cheek. "Especially someone with the mine of information you possess—"

"I musts say you sound very ominous this morning, Jack Jordan."

"And why not, when my head feels like the center of a hurricane?"

"Is that why you're leaving without your breakfast?"

"In this profession, a man eats while he works," I said, blowing a kiss from the door. "And just to show I love you, I'll be back for lunch today—honor bright."

AT the desk, I checked on the plane schedule at the Jacksonville Airport, and figured that Dan Crowell would probably show up before two o'clock. Daphne was still seated in a porch-swing as I crossed the veranda, staring hard at a newspaper in her lap. But I hadn't the heart to break in on her self-imposed hypnotism now. All the rocker brigade glared at me as I crossed the veranda, and I glared back like the marked man I was. I was so busy glaring that I almost crashed into Anita Ames on the hotel driveway.

She was hatless, walking with her head huddled into the turned-up collar of a tweed coat, and looked old enough to be a charter member of the rocker brigade herself. Her hair, like her coat, might have been slept in.

I made an effort to bow, but she walked past me as though the driveway were empty, and went slowly up the steps to the hotel, steadying herself on the veranda rail as she reached the top. In fact, it was such a perfect exhibition of shell-shock, that I thought she was acting for my benefit—until I remembered that Anita Ames was an actress in name only.

Someone pointed Masters out to me on the court-house steps. Five minutes later, we were seated over eggs and bacon in a grill-room just off the Plaza, making up for my extended nap.

Not that I'd missed much by oversleeping. Piccaris, *père et fils*, and Pud Revelli, had spent a reasonably comfortable night in clink, sending out their S. O. S. for a lawyer in the early morning. Judge Genovar was still holding his hearing, behind closed doors, to decide on the amount of bail.

Things had gone off smoothly enough, according to Masters, with pleas of not guilty all around, and rumbles of a speedy trial already in the air—providing the law firm of Snyder and Elkins couldn't fight off an indictment.

Circumstances being what they were, it seemed pretty obvious the State of Florida would charge Old Joe or his son, or both, with murder. It was just as obvious that they'd be on the street at liberty in another twenty minutes. Under state law, as Masters explained, almost anyone with a bank balance can live at home until he's brought to trial, no matter what he has done.

Chief Willis was still combing over the testimony of people who'd been at the Patio last evening. Claire Cummings had come in quite calmly this morning to back up Kirby III's alibi, anent their absence at the big moment. Duncan Green had caused a small stir by refusing to discuss the subject of his business huddle with Ray, pending legal advice from New York. The coroner had been eventually located and a verdict of death by violence had been rendered, surprising nobody.

Ray's pockets had contained a book of New York telephone numbers. A three-days-old clipping on Carey's murder (Carey's picture had been decorated with a pair of penciled-in horns). A few coins.

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A wallet crammed with large-denomination bills totalling the neat sum of fifty thousand. Ray himself had spent a tranquil night in the hospital morgue. The coroner was still sending wires north, trying to find a relative willing to claim the body.

I LET these facts ride without comment, including the fifty thousand. "Did you do any scouting around the Lakes?"

"Listen, Mr. Jordan, I stopped there on my way into town. They aren't seeing anyone, let alone reporters. Best I could do was spike a rumor that Miss Cummings and her father were set to push on to Palm Beach this morning. They're not. Kirby III begged them to stay on a few days longer, just for appearance's sake."

"Planning to leave Joe in the lurch, were they?"

"Beg pardon?"

"You'll have to get used to me, I frequently think aloud. I've got to talk to Dr. Piccari, the moment that hearing's over. Shouldn't we be getting back to the court-house?"

"Rest easy, Mr. Jordan, and enjoy your coffee. I'm friends with everyone in this town. Minute the argument's over, they'll send someone down here to warn us."

"I'd feel happier if we strolled back in that direction. Nobody could enjoy this coffee anyhow."

Let me tell you, I saw just how big this story was when we turned the corner—a healthy shock that snapped me wide-awake at once. Photographers were already hanging from telegraph poles—A. P., U. P., *Life* and newsreel boys. Local correspondents had piled into town that morning, too, along with Masters.

Dr. Joe came through the door with his lawyer just ten minutes later, looking spruce and shaved and at peace with his conscience. His father shambled out behind them, with his chin on the ground. Even if that purple suit hadn't started to run at the collar, he could have passed for a circus gorilla on a rainy day.

That is, the comparison would have held until Dr. Joe threw an arm around his shoulder, whispered some encouragement in his ear, and walked with him toward the cameras. It was a sight that did your heart good—no matter what the old scoundrel was, no matter if you thought him guilty as hell.

Father and son got into a taxi with their chests out and their eyes straight ahead, ignoring the stares. You couldn't call the murmur that went up a cheer, but it was the next best thing.

I sent Masters back into the court-house to get statements, and joined the newspaper pack on the Piccari's trail. Their taxi stopped at a small hotel, far back in the old town, and Joe rushed his father in, two jumps ahead of the A. P. car. Believe me, I got some black looks from my co-workers when the desk clerk made the other boys cool their heels downstairs and sent me up alone.

The small double room looked and smelled like a packing-box that had stood too long in the sun. Most of the space was taken up by creaky twin beds, a mail-order bureau, and the luggage Joe had had sent in from the Lakes that morning.

Old Joe was face down on the bed when I came in; he put out his hand without looking up, and shook mine flabbily. All the starch had gone out of him again, now he could let down in peace.

Joe said something soothing in Italian, and got up from the bedside. "He asks to be alone awhile, Jack. Where can we talk?"

"Let's try the backyard."

But a cameraman was already there, taking pictures of the hotel from a fancy angle. Dr. Joe squared his shoulders for the second time that day, put his hat in front of his face, and ran for the alley gate, with me on his heels.

CHAPTER XXXI

SUNDAY: NOON

TWO more alleys and three side streets later, and we were strolling through the military cemetery at the southern

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end of town, breathing normally again as we picked a sun-warmed nook and sat down to hear the chase go by. I don't suppose we could have picked a better hideaway if we'd tried. There's nothing like a nice cemetery to help you face realities.

"What's your bail?" I asked, stretching full-length on the grass.

"Five thousand for each of us. This is God's country, you know." Even his voice sounded ten years younger.

"I gather Pud is still on ice."

"Where else could we leave him? He was very difficult last night, Jack. Swore he would jump any bail they set and go to Long Island for—reinforcements."

This time, he chuckled outright.

"What's the joke?" I asked.

"I was thinking how simple it is to be a primitive man—so sure as Pud of the best course to follow."

"Speak for yourself, Doctor."

"I too have chosen my course. That is the real reason I laugh."

"Have you any idea what's hanging over you?"

"Do not remind me. This morning, I became a free man."

"A free man on bail, you mean. Listen to me, Joe—"

"Don't feel sorry for me, either—or for my father. His courage will come back soon. Once the humiliation is over. . . ."

He let that thought trail off into silence, but I understood him without words.

"What are your plans?" I asked.

"Lawyers," said Dr. Joe tersely. "This time, we are fighting back the right way. I have already wired New York. He came into this because of me; I will see him out."

"Fair enough," I said. "And now you're in this iron-jawed mood—do you want me to tell you what your chances are?"

He heard me through, quite calmly. "No one saw my father strike that blow—or me. No one can swear to it in court—"

"Can you prove you *didn't* strike it?"

"Why must I prove anything? Since when is a man guilty before he is—"

"Did you know that you've been at the head of Hurlbut's list in New York, ever since this case was opened? What more d'you think they need, now your old man's blundered in to round out the picture?"

"Do you believe we did this, Jack?"

"Not for one second," I said. "But don't call me as a character witness, especially if New York horns into this, as I'm sure they will. . . . Skip all that for the present; I'm still on the job for you, even if I am in bad odor on both fronts. Will you answer questions, before we go back and face the Fourth Estate?"

"As many as you like."

"Who d'you think swung that niblick?"

"I do not know Jack—really."

"Did you see the blow struck?"

"Yes and no."

"Make up your mind," I said.

"I WAS fighting Ray on the road. He was punching low, and hard. Already he had hit me twice about the eyes; my face was full of blood, I could scarcely see. I heard shouts, people coming from both sides.

"He hit me once more, blinding me in earnest. I put out all my strength and pushed him from me, there in the center of the road. Perhaps he reeled a few paces before he fell, I am not even sure of that. He was hit at that moment; I heard the bone splinter—"

"Think hard, fellow," I said. "You were in the middle of a moonlit road. Blinded or not, you must have had a little vision left. Someone must have joined the battle at that moment."

"Of course. I tell you *I could not see!*"

This time, I let it ride. Far back in my mind, I was listening to that same testimony in court, after a day-long cross-examination. Reading it in cold print next morning.

"You'll need lawyers, my friend—lots of them."

"I have said I am ready, Jack. Not even you can shake my confidence. Shall I tell you why?"

"If it's on the record."

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"I do not care who prints it. Come, I will illustrate."

We went through the cemetery gates, passed the Oldest House in America, and came out on the bay front.

"Better detour before we reach the Plaza," I said. "My boyfriends will be roaming in search of local color."

"Let them follow me—who cares now?"

"I do. I've an exclusive to think of."

"Good. Before we walk back into the world, here is something for your eyes alone." He passed me a note, on Casa de Mar stationery. "Exhibit A—"

Joe:

I'm at Jack's hotel, reading the funny-papers. Will you stop by for a minute, when you can? I've a personal message for you—nothing very important, but you may need a laugh at this time.

Daphne.

P. S. On second thought, I'll give you the message now, in case you want to steer clear. I love you.

"That was handed to me by my lawyer, as we came out of the hearing," said Joe. "Now read Exhibit B. It arrived at the same time."

I read the second note as we walked along the sea-wall, with Joe's arm through mine to steer my steps away from the Matanzas.

Dear Joe:

Father wanted me to leave with him, as soon as possible, but we are letting Kirby be the judge of that. Perhaps we'll be on our way South when this reaches you.

Both Kirby and father have asked me not to write this. But I feel I owe you an explanation, Heaven knows why.

It may interest you to hear that Kirby and I are to be married in the Spring. Father's public relations counsel will announce the engagement very soon now—whenever last night's mad affair has adjusted itself.

In the meantime, I know I can trust a doctor to keep a secret.

Will you believe you have all my sympathy?

C. C.

"Well, Jack?"

"Well, Doctor, I suppose it takes a little murder to bring out a girl's true colors."

WE passed the slave market. I saw the *Life* cameraman jump up from a bench and cross the street after us. I saw two heads pop out of a corner bar, followed by two bodies in the kind of unpressed suits that only district correspondents wear.

"Shall we start another Marathon?" I asked.

"Didn't I say I could face anything now?"

I watched him fold Daphne's note back into his wallet, tear up the second, and toss it into the bay. "Including that?"

"That, most of all."

"Would you say that Kirby had earned his spurs?"

"Admit he handled Ray's appearance very well last evening. It took real generalship to get Claire away from all that excitement so quickly. All I could do was throw him out, like a clumsy Quixote. Kirby was also prepared to take care of the future."

"Not really?"

We paused on the steps of the Casa de Mar, and watched the press pant down Bay Street after us.

"When Kirby talked to Ray outside the Patio last evening, he handed him fifty thousand dollars, in marked bills. You see, he was willing to pay a high price to keep his fiancée out of that second diary."

"What second diary?" I asked.

Joe chuckled in earnest. "Even the best of bankers sometimes make a wrong investment. At least, his investment was ear-marked. The law must hand it back to him, eventually."

Then Joe ran up the steps of the hotel, two jumps ahead of the Fourth Estate. I followed him, just in time to see him snatch Daphne Carter out of the porch-swing. Naturally, I was a bit too far away to pick up what they said, even if I hadn't been busy holding off those cameras until he'd finished. But I'm sure he had her in his arms in one minute flat.

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CHAPTER XXXII

SUNDAY AFTERNOON: 2:00

MASTERS had already reported to my room as per schedule, and was being polite to Trudy when I came up. He had spent a busy hour chasing copy, and had gotten nowhere fast, though he did have one fact to add to the collection.

Duncan Green had finally broken down and admitted that he had come from New York to persuade Ray to sign a writer-producer contract in Hollywood. Mr. Green also admitted, reluctantly, that his persuasions had been highly unsuccessful. However, despite urgent picture commitments on the Coast, he was only too glad to co-operate with Chief Willis by remaining on the spot for a day or so.

Well, it made sense, after a fashion. I suppose a movie producer would buy the picture rights to his own funeral, if he could handle the distribution contract.

"I think this calls for a whisky sour," I said, after we had co-ordinated our notes. "Don't ask me why. Certainly, we've nothing to celebrate."

"I ordered whisky sours some time ago," said Trudy, "the minute I saw you come up the street. Shouldn't we invite Miss Carter?"

"Miss Carter has just been taken care of," I said. "Quite adequately, I think."

"Just as you say, dear. I'll call room service again."

But the cocktails arrived at that precise moment, with a telegram for me on the tray, which rather spoiled the effect.

HURLBUT ARRIVING ST AUGUSTINE TOMORROW STOP CONFIDENTIALLY INFORMED HE CONSIDERS CASE CLOSED STOP UNCONFIRMED RUMOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY OFFICE HERE SEEKING GRAND JURY INDICTMENT PICCARIS STOP RAYS LAWYERS REVEAL HIS AFFAIRS TANGLED STATE BAD INVESTMENTS OWED EVERYBODY DOES THAT HELP EXPLAIN HIS ACTIONS

MACDONALD

"It helps a lot," I muttered, glaring at the telegram.

I saw Masters edge away from me instinctively. Trudy patted his arm. "Enjoy your cocktail, Mr. Masters. My husband is only deducing."

"Read it aloud," I said, tossing the telegram over to her. "Let it sink in."

Trudy obliged. "I think it's a very simple wire, darling. They want Dr. Piccari and his father to stand trial up north. This detective friend of yours has come to take them back."

"I've seen that coming for a long time," I said. "What's your reaction to the last part?"

"About Mr. Ray being broke? Who isn't, in this day and age?"

"Don't you see that those debts put him under Carey's thumb for the first time in his career? He needed money even worse than Carey needed circulation. He needed it badly enough to uncork all he had in that omnibus manuscript. No wonder he dove for cover right afterward, and hauled up his drawbridge.

"Things started popping right away—much worse than he feared. With Carey dead, he knew he had small chance of collecting on that contract, unless he came through with another manuscript, which was the last thing he would dare do at the moment.

"There he was on that island, fighting off the heebie-jeebies, and wondering where the next meal was coming from—not to mention the next bullet. . . . Then Old Joe turns up, with an offer of a bullet-proof hideaway. Kirby III is johnny-on-the-spot too, with a chunk of real hush-money.

"It was exactly what he wanted, and he snapped it up. By that time, he was afraid of everything and everybody. Of course he'd turn down Hollywood offers, or any offer that brought him into the open again. The bigger the spotlight, the better the target."

I took back the telegram, and clipped it into my notes. "Not that this has any bearing on who swung the niblick," I said. "Let's go down to lunch."

THE first person I saw as we came into the lobby was Dan Crowell, sitting shyly in a corner with his portable in his lap, and looking exactly like a

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sophomore home from mid-year exams. Even that glimpse of Dan answered a lot of questions for me this morning. Would Mac be sending a Columbia cub to relieve me, if he didn't agree with Hurlbut? Not that these gloomy reflections kept me from shaking hands warmly.

"They said you were giving a cocktail party in your room, Jack. I didn't want to disturb—"

"Just for that we'll all have another in the bar," I said, a lot more jovially than I felt.

But Trudy was already shepherding Dan and Masters toward the grill. "It's well past two," she said severely. "If Mr. Crowell needs an eye-opener, they can serve it at the table."

The grill-room was jammed with newshawks. At first I thought Joe and Daphne had sought sanctuary here, but the boys had concentrated this time on Anita and Evans, who were seated at a corner table, surrounded by golf-bags, and obviously at bay. We were just in time to see Duncan Green complete the trio with a broken-field run that would have done credit to an All-American end, scatter those reporters with explosive, shooing motions, and bellow for a waiter.

I got a good look at Anita now. She was made up to the eyes, and seemed very well indeed—a younger sister of the witch I'd passed on the driveway two short hours ago. She and Evans were both smiling at Green. I saw Evans press her hand, in plain view of her husband—who snorted once more, and ordered shrimps creole.

Then those newspapersmen spotted me, and descended en masse. Most of them had flown down with Dan, and chipped in on a car from Jacksonville. Every New York daily must have sent a man, including Mona Toohey, the *Record's* prize sob-sister. Lacking Mr. Green's shooing technique, I put in a bad ten minutes before I could fight my way out to the corner table Trudy had chosen.

"We're safe for the moment," I said to Dan. "Start talking whenever the spirit moves you."

"What do you want to know, Jack?"

"What Mac's thinking, of course. Not to mention Hurlbut."

"Sorry, no one confided in me. The auditor just handed me a plane ticket, and—"

"Listen, Columbia. From this moment on, I'm at liberty, and you're elected. All I want to do is set your feet right."

"Mac told me that you'd covered the local angle perfectly, so far as he was concerned."

"In other words, it's a wash-up?"

"He said I'd have an easy time of it. All I'm supposed to do is file an on-the-spot report. When Lieutenant Hurlbut arrives tomorrow."

I handed him Mac's last wire. "That clinches it," I said. "It's the chance of a lifetime to pot Old Joe, and they aren't going to miss it. I'm making a prediction, here and now, that Hurlbut has an assistant district attorney in his pocket when he shows up, with a secret indictment in apple-pie order. All he'll need then is a court order to cart the Piccaris straight back to New York. Nobody's going to let them out on bail, once they're *that* close to Ossining."

"Why are you so excited, Jack? Don't you want to see justice done?"

"Certainly, if Justice takes her time and weighs the facts."

"I should say the facts spoke for themselves."

YOU could see he had been over this with every staff man in the shop. I was doing my best to stir him up, so he'd relay those opinions to me.

"The *Star* printed an editorial this morning, demanding the Piccaris' extradition," said Dan. "So did the *Record,* and—"

"Based on what evidence?"

"The findings of the Florida police. The testimony of more than twenty eye witnesses. Dr. Piccari's suspicious behavior in New York. The fact his father flew down here with you—"

"We'll take those in order. What have the Florida police found, so far, besides

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one dead columnist, and a broken golf-club? Did one witness see that club in use? Why shouldn't Dr. Joe come down here to talk with Ray? So did Green, the Cummings, the Lakes, and God knows how many more we've missed. Why shouldn't Old Joe trail his son, for the same purpose?"

"No reason at all. And there's no reason why one or both of them shouldn't fly into a fine Italian rage and shut Ray up for keeps. It's just as simple as a problem in geometry, really."

"You *have* been listening to Hurlbut, my boy."

"Fact Number One," said Dan doggedly. "Dr. Piccari was badly worried, from the moment the *Star* announced publication of the diary. He questioned you about it that night at the Miramar, and again in his office. Yes Jack, I'm afraid they worked pretty hard on the doctor's receptionist. She finally remembered your visit."

"Damn it all, he only asked me to advise him—"

"How does Hurlbut know what he asked you? And even so—couldn't Dr. Piccari *pretend* to be worried, with that diary manuscript locked in his desk all the time? When his only real worry was how much the police knew, and how good his chances were of leaving New York in a hurry?

"Fact Number Two: Dr. Piccari did leave town, just before they came to question him. Hurlbut knows that he caught a four o'clock plane with Daphne Carter. Plenty of time to take care of Nancy Janeway in that traffic scramble outside the Furness Pier, and get on the express highway to Newark.

"Fact Number Three: his father comes south with you, straight to Ray's hide-away. You must have realized that Hurlbut would send someone to the airport to clock all the planes. You and Old Joe were spotted, taking the night express to Jacksonville. Under circumstances that can scarcely be described as above-board.

"Fact the Last: Dr. Joe arrived in St. Augustine the night before you, made a bold show of visiting the Lakes, while keeping in close touch with his old man. Between them, they cook up some scheme to trap Ray. Ray breaks free of it, skips out to this shindig at the Patio. Dr. Joe loses his head and drags Ray off into the dark, just as Old Joe catches up, and—"

"Not another word," I said, "or I'll think you're working for Hurlbut too."

"If I've said anything to offend you, Jack—"

I pressed Trudy's hand. "How can you offend a man who's just been sent on his vacation?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

SUNDAY AFTERNOON: 3:30

WILLIS had announced a mass interview for the press at three sharp, so Dan and Masters had to skip dessert to get out with the others. It seemed very quiet in the grill when they had gone. Almost too quiet to endure after the Hollywood trio had taken their bags and departed for the links.

"Well," said Trudy brightly, "how does it feel to be a free man?"

"Don't tell me I look emancipated at this moment?"

"Well dear, Mr. Crowell's taken over the assignment, and you're sitting here with me at three in the afternoon without a thing to do—"

"Just like an insurance ad, eh? How to retire at thirty—"

"On the contrary," said Trudy. "The men in those insurance ads are always smiling. Couldn't you oblige, too—just to please me?"

"Not until I've finished wrestling with my conscience. I've got to decide which side I'm on—Dr. Joe's, or Hurlbut's. It isn't too easy, you know."

"Can't you just stay neutral?"

"Not after that second wire of Mac's. Even money says Joe and his father will be in bracelets this time tomorrow, on their way North. . . . Suppose I telephone Joe right now? Advise him to skip

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bail and head for Cuba and points south?"

"Please don't do anything rash, Jack, without—"

"Don't worry. Judging by what he said this morning, Joe intends to fight it out." I slapped the table, bringing the sleepy waiter on the run. "For that matter, so do I. Let's get into the fresh air. So far, I've been too busy to breathe much of it."

Green was nosing that top-heavy limousine up the driveway as Trudy and I came out on the hotel veranda. I perched on the rail, watching gloomily while two worshiping bellhops stowed their clubs in the trunk-rack.

"What would you really like to do this afternoon, darling?" asked Trudy.

I came back to her with a start. "Think," I said "as fast as possible."

"Shall we drive to a quiet spot, or would you rather be alone?"

"It doesn't matter in the slightest," I said, rudely. "What were *your* plans, assuming I hadn't turned up?"

"I'd thought vaguely of golf," said Trudy.

"Golf?"

"Anita Ames asked me, early this morning—wasn't that wonderful?"

"Don't tell me those Californians were going to have you make a foursome?"

"Only if you were busy," said Trudy. "Miss Ames was very definite about that. She said she was sure you and Mr. Green wouldn't care to appear on the same links.

I watched Hollywood drive off down the Bay front. "Let's put it to the test," I said. "That's very interesting, you know—hearing that they planned to pump you in my absence."

"But darling, you know how golf always makes you furious—"

"Please, Mrs. Jordan; I already explained that I was listening to bells."

Deputies had been stationed on the country club road to chase snoopers, especially if they had New York police-cards in their hats; and every detective in the county, both in and out of uniform, must have been combing the scrub around the Patio. They finally let us through to the clubhouse . . . where we flashed the guest card we'd borrowed at the hotel desk, and went to pay our green fees and take out joint ownership on a caddy.

I remember all this perfectly, you understand; I even remember asking when Mr. Green's party had teed off, and rejoicing to learn that they were already well out. After all, I wanted solitude for the little experiment I had in mind.

I don't remember planning that experiment constructively, either. The bells were ringing in both ears now, and I had begun to control their tonal quality with the ease of a carillon player.

Nothing else mattered much, alongside the tune I was improvising—the telegram I phoned to Western Union while Trudy was borrowing clubs from the caddy-master—and the silent prayer I sent up: *Dear Lord, don't let Pop go out for a nap in a movie this afternoon. Please Lord, have Pop Walsh on the job in that file-room when my wire is delivered.*

TRUDY won the first hole by a fair margin—that is, she chipped up to the cup for an easy five, while I was taking seven. My wife has played medal golf since she was a girl, and can spot me twenty strokes on any course from Banff to Bermuda. This has troubled me greatly on more normal occasions.

Walking in a dream this afternoon while I listened to my bells, I scarcely noticed the beating I was taking. In fact, I only cursed from a sense of form when I hooked a good quarter-mile into the rough on the third tee. So help me, I'd been doing my best to land in the rough ever since we left the clubhouse.

"Keep the caddy and meet me on the green," I said, reaching in the bag for a Number Nine iron.

"You'll need more than a niblick to blast out of there," said Trudy.

"Nonsense," I said, already knee-deep in the scrub. "Don't you know a niblick is my favorite club?"

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Let me tell you, I had that shaft broken across my knee long before Trudy could locate her ball on the fairway. What's more, I'd squared off a hundred feet from the first jack-pine the moment she was out of sight, and hurled the club straight at the trunk—using a full overhand throw, like an outfielder pegging from deep center, and letting the iron almost touch the ground behind me as I began the swing.

I took three practice throws before I got the knack, but after that I could make the bark fly four times out of six.

A fat foursome was coming up to the third tee when I made my final toss, but I was past caring then. I ran straight down the fairway for all their shouts of 'fore! I saw Trudy patiently waiting for me on the fourth tee, and waved that broken niblick like a golfer in a comic strip.

"I told you I'd blast out somehow," I said.

"What a shame, darling. A borrowed club, too—" Then she got a real glimpse of my face, and stepped nearer instinctively, as though to keep me from falling. "What was your score on the third?"

"A dodo," I said. "Come back to the clubhouse, I think I've won the match."

CHAPTER XXXIV

SUNDAY AFTERNOON: 4:30

WHEN Dan and Chief Willis drove up to that country-club veranda a half-hour later. I was still sitting beside Trudy on the putting green, with our golf-bag sprawled on the grass beside us, trying to convince her that I wasn't insane, and doing a poor job.

Thank Heaven, most of the club's regular members were still out on the course at the time, so the Chief's arrival didn't cause more than a mild stir—except from Trudy, who threw down her cigarette and all but took the law in her arms.

"Now you'll make sense, Jack Jordan, or I'll know the reason why."

"I intend to do nothing else from this moment on," I said. "Unfortunately, my sweet, what I have to say is for Chief Willis' ears alone."

"Then what's Mr. Crowell doing here?"

"He's going to play phonograph records for you in the club bar, and stand by."

It took time, which I needed badly, but I got my way eventually. We left Trudy and Dan over tall glasses, and came out into the sun again. I'd just remembered that I needed my golf-bag.

"Where can we go that's quiet, Chief?"

"Suppose we drive down the road to the Patio?" said Willis. "I want to look around again before it gets dark."

"Sorry, I've got to wait here for a message," I said, putting a hand on his arm that shook a lot more than I liked.

Pop's answer to my wire was due any minute now. Overdue, in fact, when I remembered that it might make a monkey out of me after all. I knew that I'd been too hasty, phoning Willis the moment we came off the course. I knew that I should have waited for Pop's telegram to cover me from every angle.

"We can sit under that oak, if you like," said the Chief, evenly.

His gentleness had begun to frighten me a little, now. Of course, it was a different kind of calm from Hurlbut's, but it gave you the same feeling of T.N.T. underneath, if it was pushed too far.

We sat down side-by-side on a broken-back bench, under a giant live-oak beside the eighteenth green. I pulled down the zipper on my golf-bag, took out a putter, and nervously decapitated a dandelion. "Did I sound too loco when I phoned you, Chief?"

"Listen, son, I've been in this business too long to call anyone crazy anymore. I'll admit it's a temptation, after the day I've put in and the newspapermen I've talked to."

"And yet here you are."

"Do you think I'd talk to one more, if I'd given up hope for the human race?" He flashed me a smile that smoothed my nerves down like so much novocaine. "Speak up, Jordan."

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"Remember what I promised on the telephone?"

"Sure," he said, calmly. "You promised to close this case for me, if I had a little faith."

"I'm keeping that promise. Only I've got to tell this my way, from the beginning. Including a little ancient history from three days back.

"YOU'LL remember Owen Carey had a private elevator to his office in the New York *Star*. A secret elevator, so far as almost all the staff was concerned. Traffic was quite heavy in that automatic *ascenseur*, during Carey's last hour on earth.

"His first callers were Larry Ray and Daphne, bearing the diary manuscript. Then Daphne and I went down to the street in that private car, followed some time afterward by Ray himself. A few minutes after Ray's descent, a young lady named Doris Blake—who hasn't been mentioned in the news stories to date—whisked into that elevator, and rode up to see Carey."

"Wait a minute," said Willis.

"I can't, Chief; there isn't time. You'll have to take Miss Blake's visit on faith and let me show you how it fits the jigsaw. Count up the people that have used that private car. Including this ex-protegée of Carey's, who came to make one last plea for her fiance, Senator Parsons."

I took a deep breath. "I'm telling you that the list includes everyone who knew of that elevator's existence, with the exception of Mac, our city editor, *and Nancy Janeway.*"

"Are you suggesting Miss Janeway murdered Carey?"

"I'm insisting, first of all, that she was somewhere in the offing when Doris Blake made her hurried visit. Otherwise, she wouldn't have called Hurlbut the next afternoon and threatened to make a full confession, including a lot of catty bean-spilling where Parsons and Miss Blake were concerned.

"I'm also insisting that Nancy Janeway was cautious enough to wait until the coast was really clear before taking the elevator herself . . . and desperate enough to bring a companion. Obviously, a companion who had as much to fear from that diary as she did—"

"Isn't that a pretty long guess?"

"Why? Nancy must have been in on Carey's death in some way. Even Hurlbut admits that. She had easy access to Carey's office; in fact, she was the only staff member except Ray, who used that private car regularly. Carey took quite a pushing around before he went through the window. Granted that he was only a wisp, it would have taken more than Nancy to handle him that roughly—"

A Western Union boy pedaled lazily up the driveway on his bicycle. I waved frantically, but he drifted right past without noticing, and went in the clubhouse door.

"Go on," said the Chief. "The steward'll send it out, if it's for you."

"Stay with my story, Willis," I said, forcing myself to do the same. "Admit that Nancy *could* have come into that office with a companion, tucked that diary under her arm, and left with time to spare."

"Go on," he repeated.

I pulled my eyes back from the clubhouse door. His voice had a thin edge which warned me that he wasn't enjoying my stalling half as much as I'd hoped.

"Admit that they could have taken the diary home that night, read it at their leisure, probably destroyed it—"

THEN I relaxed with a little sigh. The club steward was running across the putting green in our direction, with a yellow envelope in his hand. I went to meet him, slapped a dollar in his palm, and read the message on my way back to Willis.

When I picked up my threads this time, I could afford to ignore the snarls.

"All right, Chief," I said. "That's as far as my guesswork went, when I came to Florida. Almost anyone could have

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given Carey that pushing around, with an assist from Nancy. Anyone who happened to be a good driver, and a first-class marksman, could have picked up Nancy's trail that afternoon at the Waldorf, and shot her through the window.

"But you'll admit it took a special kind of expert to strike down Larry Ray on a moonlit road with twenty people closing in on him."

I opened my golf-bag—very slowly, to give my hands a chance to stop trembling—and took out that broken niblick. "Would you say this was a fair copy of the actual weapon?"

"Fair enough," said Willis.

"Watch," I said, slipping the club up my coat-sleeve, and lining up the first convenient pine-tree.

"Well?" said Willis, as he watched the bark fly.

"Well," I said, "that solves the timing, doesn't it?"

Then it happened. He came at me, blazing mad, and grabbed both my arms. "Make sense, Jordan, and make it fast."

All the piled-up nerves of a sleepless night were in that sharp bark. Not to mention the thousand-and-one dumb questions he'd answered all day. The strafing from higher-up that was sure to come . . .

"I'm making sense right now."

"Are you telling me that Ray was killed by a thrown golf club?"

"I've just demonstrated that it's possible—after twenty minutes' practice. Suppose you'd practice all your life. Suppose you came to the Patio last night on Larry Ray's trail, just as I've already suggested. Suppose you had just snatched that niblick out of a golf-bag, and tucked it in your sleeve . . .

"A few minutes later, you spot Larry Ray, fighting outside with Dr. Joe. You see them disappear down a path into the scrub. You rush into the dark after them . . . being careful to stay in the dark, and more than careful to let someone else lead the way.

"You hear Dr. Joe and Ray, trading punches somewhere just ahead. They come into sight, still punching. You fall back, knowing this is your last chance.

"No one sees you throw that club. Not even Dr. Joe, who has just given Ray one last blind punch. A round-house blow, that sends Ray spinning into the middle of the moonlit road—a swell target for a sharpshooter like yourself, a safe twenty paces away in the dark.

"Remember, you've killed like this ever since you were a boy. Everything from kangaroos to bushmen—"

I took my time handing Willis that wire. He read it slowly, like a kid just out of kindergarten.

BOOMERANG THROWING IN PICTURE AUSTRALIA REVIEWED STAR NINETEEN THIRTY-TWO AUGUST SEVENTH PAGE TWENTY-THREE COLUMN SIX MARK EVANS A FEATURED PERFORMER

J J WALSH

CHAPTER XXXV

SUNDAY AFTERNOON: 5:00

"WELL?" said Willis. He had sat there, perfectly motionless, for sixty seconds.

"Well Chief," I replied, "didn't I tell you the case was closed?"

"Go on," he said.

"Pop didn't mention it in the wire, but I reviewed *Australia* for the *Star*," I said. "Would I have asked the file-room to back up my memory, if I hadn't had Evans on my list all along?"

I came to a full stop on that. But Willis didn't break in.

"Let's go back to the beginning, one last time," I said. "First of all, Evans and Nancy Janeway were together, more or less, that night of the Miramar opening. It was Nancy who brought me over to his table; Nancy who helped put him into a taxi after he'd taken that drunken poke at me.

"What's to prevent her from driving him around the Park until he was fairly sober, then using him as a strongarm squad of one, when she called on Carey?

"Next, I'd like to remind you that I was taking Nancy's place when I went up to interview Anita. Evans had plenty

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of time to pick up the fact that Nancy was due at the Waldorf. And then, *I* walk into the room instead.

"When he learned that Nancy had backed out of the interview, his suspicion that she was laying low, and preparing a full confession, must have reached the boiling point. The rude way I turned down his apology and barged out didn't help soothe his nerves, either.

"So far, of course, I'm just blowing smoke rings in the dark.

"But Evans might have trailed me down to the Waldorf lobby that afternoon, and stayed on my trail right out to the taxi stand. Imagine his feelings, when he watched me jump into the same cab with Nancy Janeway—and saw a police car follow us from the curb.

"Why couldn't he whip out and join the procession, from a safe distance? At least, he would have been the first to know, if our little parade had ended up at headquarters.

"I don't think he plotted Nancy's murder, in any way. But he was a picture cowboy, with a permit to carry a gun, even in night clubs. Unlike most picture cowboys, Evans had really ridden herd in his day, and could shoot straight.

"Get inside his head, and witness the turmoil. While he plowed down Forty-ninth Street after us. When he saw me jump out of that cab and run across the street to my boat . . .

"After all, there was a chance that Nancy had sat tight on their secret for the time being. Wouldn't he have been a damned fool to trust her any longer? Especially when she made such a good target at that moment?

"We know that he took an afternoon plane with Green and Anita; in other words, he was prepared to leave town, with his baggage gone, and no check on his moves for the next two hours. Why, he could have drilled Nancy through the window of that cab, without even breaking the rhythm of his drive to Newark.

"Look at him that evening, breathing a little easier. Putting New York farther behind with each turn of those propellers. Hearing via the radio that the police were banging up against the old stone wall. . . . Yes, he must have considered himself a very clever fellow, sitting in that plane between his producer and his favorite co-star, flying to Florida for a business talk with Ray.

"Of course, his tranquillity is short-lived. When Ray coolly turns down Green's offer of a picture contract—and announces that he is planning a grand coup—Evans must have been frightened out of his wits. Certainly, he was panicky enough to double back into those palmettoes, and take a pot-shot at anything on Cedar Island—including me.

"From that point on, of course, he must have put on the finest performance of his life to keep down the jitters. But even money says he was a few strokes over par when he came out here yesterday.

"All right, Chief. That's my blueprint, up to the time of Ray's murder. Obviously, I couldn't use it yet to build a jail for Evans. Not with so many lines missing, and such D-minus trigonometry. Not even when I heard that Anita had fainted beside the body. Or when I spotted her today, still looking like the witch of Endor."

I SMOOTHED out Pop's telegram on my knee. "Do you know what rang the bell and made me wire north for this? It was a glimpse I got of Evans' golf-bag, not two hours ago. Just as the bell-hop was throwing it in the trunk rack of their car in our hotel driveway . . .

"Evans has won tournaments in Hollywood, and his bag looks as though it had been through most of them. So did his wooden clubs. But every iron I could see —from Number One to the putter—was *brand-new*.

"Sit still thirty seconds more; I'm almost finished. I say that Evans left that bag in the trunk rack, when they drove in from the links yesterday. I say he snatched out a club at random last night, making a perfect missle of it by snapping the shaft.

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"This morning, you asked everyone to stay on in St. Augustine a day or so longer, until your inquiry was completed. Evans realized he must see it through. He also realized that the police might decide to check details pretty thoroughly.

"What sort of spot would Evans be in, if you recalled that he was a medal golfer—went through his bag—and noticed that a Number Nine iron of a matched professional set was missing?"

Willis was on his feet now, but I pulled him back. "I say that Evans dumped every one of his tournament irons in the Matanzas at the crack of dawn, and put a brand-new set in his bag, just to be ready for the golf date he'd already made with Green and Anita for this afternoon. Just so he wouldn't look too foolish, in case he needed a niblick to chip out of a trap."

I let St. Augustine's Chief of Police get up, this time—simply because it would have taken a superman to hold him.

"Are you sure that Evans is on the links now, Jordan?"

I pointed through the pine-grove on our left. "Why else would I be telling this so fast? There's the threesome, coming down from the seventeenth green."

THE seventeenth is a dog-leg hole on that course, a fact which gave us plenty of leisure to pick our spot. We were crouched behind a bunker when he saw the first ball sail over the pin—Green's to judge by the bad language that followed it. Anita pitched neatly to the green, and a caddy came up to take down the flag. He stood beside the bunker, out of the way of the next approach, near enough for me to touch, if I'd dared to move a muscle at that moment.

Evans pitched up from the fairway, straight at our ambush. One of those pitches that end up as a drive, smoking through the grass of the far bunker, and winging for the next fairway. Evans, it seemed, could express himself quite as fluently as Green when the occasion demanded. Willis and I smiled at each other when we heard him stamp across the green. Things couldn't have turned out more to our liking, if we'd called those shots to order.

And then, Anita screamed.

Don't ask me what possessed her to climb that bunker ahead of Evans—or why he should pick that precise moment to go back to his bag. Willis and I came over the top as one man, expecting to bump noses with him. Instead, we saw him standing on the other side of the green, a fistful of clubs in his hand, looking every inch the actor in his balloon slacks and burnt-orange pullover.

One second later, he was just a jack-rabbit breaking for cover.

Thank Heaven, he dropped those clubs when Willis fired over his head. I was running too, to cut off his path as he headed for the woods. At the time, that shot seemed unreal and far away, like a starter's gun at a track meet.

He was two jumps into the palmettoes when I tackled him. We rolled over several times before he kicked himself free—which gave Willis time to catch up. When I saw Evans' hand dive for a pocket, I tackled him a second time. I knew I'd stopped the war—in more ways than one—just before that bright autumn afternoon went down to blackout. . . .

EVERYTHING was scrappy after that, like a movie that's been spliced once too often. When I came out of it the first time, I'd floated back to that clubhouse veranda, with my head in Trudy's lap. Willis loomed in the dim background, smiling that soothing smile. I tried to grin back, only my face muscles refused to function.

"Believe me now, Chief?" I murmured. I was both pleased and surprised to find that I could speak. So pleased, in fact, that I decided to rest on my laurels without elaboration.

When I came out of it again, I found I was on my back in a strange bed, smelling vaguely of chloroform. An equally strange doctor was balancing a suture needle in his palm, much too close for

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comfort. The light hurt my eyes until Dr. Joe stepped forward to turn the shade the other way.

"Splendid, Dr. Pope. Sure you don't mind my standing by?"

"It's an honor, Dr. Piccari. I'm afraid his shoulder is broken. Otherwise—"

That's when I stopped taking notes for quite awhile.

. . . It was late at night, now. Trudy and Dan were sitting by the bed. That is, I heard their voices, still far away. Dan seemed to be addressing me, and I felt that I should be polite and answer. Somehow, it was too comfortable for a change . . . just listening . . . without asking a single question.

"Keep on, Mr. Crowell," said Trudy.

"Evans signed a full confession, Jack," said Dan, eagerly. "Did you know he was mixed up in a murder, years ago, in Sydney? Won't it be a joke on Hurlbut, if the British Empire extradites him, instead of New York County?"

"No wonder he took that swing at you in the Miramar," picked up Trudy. I noticed that they both used the odd, mincing tone parents have when they're playing Santa Claus for their children. "He thought Mr. Ray had written his death warrant on the affair in Australia, and left it with Carey. That's why he went to the *Star* with Nancy Janeway."

"He didn't mean to kill the big boss," said Dan. "Not if the boss would give up that manuscript without an argument. Still insists that he did nothing more than push Carey against the far wall. Then, of course, the curtains ripping . . ."

When I woke up again, I felt fine. Maybe I'd passed out that time with my eyes open. At least, Dan was still talking.

". . . streaked up the first ramp to the express highway, and joined Green and Anita in Newark, innocent as a lamb."

But I was doing my best to get out of bed. "Where's Anita Ames? She must have known about some of this."

"I don't think so, dear," said Trudy. "She *was* right with Evans when they ran up to Ray's body, but—"

"Just the same, I want a statement."

"Mr. Crowell took her statement on Sunday, Jack."

"Beat the town with hours to spare," said Dan.

"Wait a minute," I murmured, a lot more feebly than I felt. "What day is this?"

. "Lie back," said Trudy. "It's Monday midnight. You had a nice long sleep yesterday—remember?"

I let her ease me into the pillows without a struggle. If this was Monday, I'd been on my vacation just five days now. Maybe it was time I started enjoying it. . . . Besides, no city editor could ask a man with a broken shoulder to sit at a typewriter and do a story. Not even George MacDonald.

THE END

"I TALKED WITH GOD"

(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 79, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 79, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

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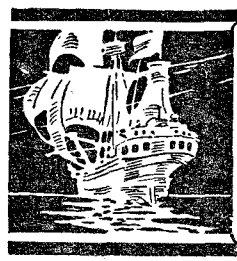

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

WE HAVE a very brief one-act play, without scenery, which we are going to present. All the characters are imaginary, and so on; but the theme, as you'll suspect, has some basis in fact. . . . Enter an Author, who for some years has been writing excellent fiction about the Old West. In the last three weeks he has submitted five stories concerned with the Nazi aggression, and now he's come, at the editor's request, to remove them.

Author (with bitter resentment): Of course I thought you'd want this sort of thing.

Editor (falling back on an old wheeze): They didn't seem quite right for us.

Author (as if reasoning with a small, stupid child): There is a war going on in Europe—a large one.

Editor: Yes. It's got into the papers.

Author (magnificent in his indignation): Well, are you afraid to face the facts? Are you going to skulk in your ivory tower while thousands of men and women and children are being slaughtered? Are you, I ask?

Editor (oh, so softly): About your stories: Those guns you spoke of haven't been used for ten years. Your prediction about German strategy was refuted two weeks ago in the newspapers. Both those alliances of yours were broken day before yesterday. If you'll look at a map . . . As a matter of fact, we're anxious to get some good war stories.

Author: Say, I had a swell idea for a Western. This girl . . .

That's enough of that. Now we call your attention to an interesting discussion of fantastics, in particular and in general.

CORYDON SNYDER

I notice that there is some discussion going on over Merritt's stories. I liked "Seven Footprints to Satan," and I liked some parts of "The Ship of Ishtar," but not as a whole, and most of the other stories of Merritt's I thought were "unworthy."

At this writing I don't know how "The Ninth Life" by Jack Mann will come out, but it may serve to bring up a point that I think should be passed on to the authors, especially those writing science-fiction. I like these stories as long as they call up the thought: "It could be."

Sometimes a good story will be spoiled by an illogical conclusion, or mixed up, unrelated parts. "The Ship of Ishtar" seemed that way to me. However, that's not the point I'm most interested in passing along, but this: Most of us have gotten away from a belief in "demons" that can control our lives against the wishes of a just and almighty God, and, in my opinion, it is nothing short of sacrilege to put them into stories.

We live in an orderly universe, and if we believe in a God, he should represent the best we can conceive. Science points to a great plan, even if parts are vague as yet. One doesn't have to believe in any religious dogma to feel that some fiction not only offends our intelligence, but is a direct offense against the Infinite Being. The suggestion that there are "other gods" I think is such an offense.

I can concede the destruction of the earth by natural forces, or by man-made ones, yet not disturb my faith in a Supreme Being, even though I can't conceive what He may be like.

Space travel, physical or mental, if you like, and most anything except "other gods" or demons, that can control Destiny. If it's not sacrilege, it's at least not good taste for the authors to hand it out to us.

CHICAGO, ILL.

WE'D like to hear from other readers on this subject. Do you agree? . . . It seems only right that we should turn you over now to one of Mr. Merritt's admirers, who are legion.

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R. L. FRANCIS

Regarding this matter of reprinting those undoubted masterpieces of A. Merritt, please accept my vote of approval and of thanks. I am waiting impatiently for more of the same. The reprinting of "The Ship of Ishtar" and "Seven Footprints to Satan," along with the introduction of such characters as Dr. Kildare and Captain Hornblower, has done much to improve ARGOSY in the past few months. And I join with P. N. Nicholaioff in acclaiming the appearance of Virgil Finlay in ARGOSY. He is indeed the master illustrator of the weird and the fantastic. More of these, too, please.
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA.

Mr. Francis and numerous others will be delighted to hear that Virgil Finlay will reappear in ARGOSY shortly. We, and several other editors, are just as enthusiastic about his work as any of you.

P. V. M.

"Lords of Creation" is the first science-fiction story I ever liked; with the action taking place on this planet and nothing in the plot to insult the intelligence of the reader, it is one hundred percent.

Also a hundred percent in my estimation are: all Theodore Roscoe stories; all Karl Detzer's fireman stories; all Borden Chase's sandhog stories; "Voyage to Leandro," which was one of the most thrilling adventure stories I ever read.

As to the short stories: "The Rifle of Feroz Khan," and "The Last Pigtail" are worthy of first prize in any contest.

ARGOSY has always been the best magazine.
NEWTON, MASS.

DON RENEGADE

Men of quality call you El Renegado, and in truth you are a rogue, *señor*, dressed in your tatters, so free with your braggart's speech. Yet one must admit that you have the courage of seven devils, and with that good steel in your hand you may win high glory in this gallant, wild land. Beginning a romantic and exciting new novel of Alta California, by the author of the famous Zorro stories,
JOHNSTON McCULLEY

CHAOS IS A QUIET PLACE

Quiet, that is, compared to Cairo and Alexandria after Savoy and Fisher have landed and taken over. From hasheesh dens and black narrow streets, where *hashashin* lurk with knives, to a jolly yacht party where T.N.T. is served by furtive Egyptians, these two Yankees cut a fine swath of broken heads. A complete novelet by
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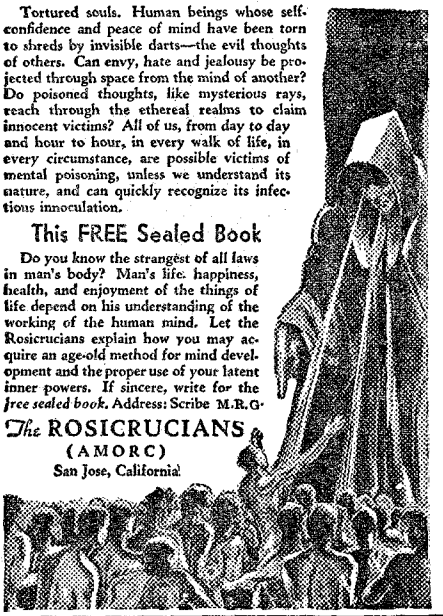
Mental Poisoning!

Thoughts that Enslave Minds

Tortured souls. Human beings whose self-confidence and peace of mind have been torn to shreds by invisible darts—the evil thoughts of others. Can envy, hate and jealousy be projected through space from the mind of another? Do poisoned thoughts, like mysterious rays, reach through the ethereal realms to claim innocent victims? All of us, from day to day and hour to hour, in every walk of life, in every circumstance, are possible victims of mental poisoning, unless we understand its nature, and can quickly recognize its infectious innoculation.



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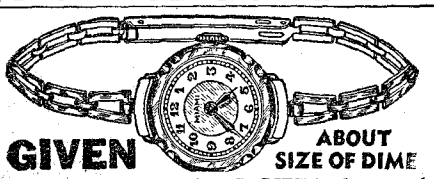

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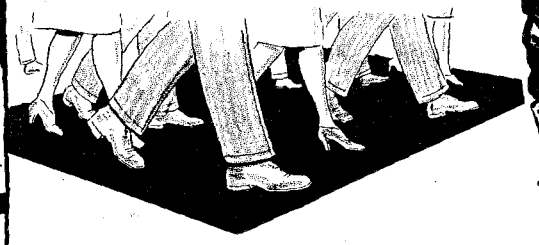

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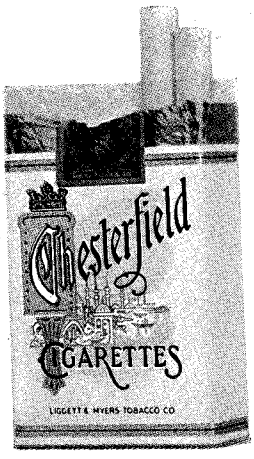

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